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XIV.

WHILE their place in the community was thus indefinite, they dwelt with the brothers and sisters who had first received them in the office. Egeria helped the sisters in their work there, and they all liked to have her about them, though it was tacitly agreed that she belonged chiefly to Sister Frances, with whom she served, making the beds, wiping the dishes, and putting the rooms in order, while Diantha and Rebecca devoted themselves to the more public duties of the place. As she grew stronger she would not be kept from taking her share in the family work. Frances forbade her helping in the laundry, where one of the brothers, vague through wreaths of steam from the deep boilers, presided over a company of sisters and boys, and afterwards

marshalled them in hanging out the community wash; this, she held, involved dangers of rheumatism and relapse; but she allowed her to find a place in the herb-house, where a score of the young Shakeresses, seated on the floor of the wide, low room, before fragrant heaps of catnip, boneset, and lobelia, sorted and cleaned these simples for the brothers in the packing-room below. "That is sort of being out-doors," said Sister Frances, with a sly allusion to the girl's well-known passion. Indeed, Egeria's chief usefulness appeared when the first wild berries came. Her father no longer accompanied her, for he found the heat too great a burden. The women went, five or six in a wagon, with one of the brothers, who drove, to the berry pasture a mile or two away, and they sang their shrill hymns while passing through the pine woods, that gave out a balsamic sweetness in the sun. At the verge of a westward-sloping valley was a stretch of many hundred acres, swept by a forest fire a few years before, and now rank with the vegetation which the havoc had enriched. Blueberries and huckleberries, raspberries and blackberries, battened upon the ashes of the pine and oak and chestnut, and flourished round the charred stumps; the straw-

berry matted the blackened ground, and ran to the border of the woods, where, among the thin grass, it lifted its fruit on taller stems, and swung its clusters in the airs that drew through the alleys of the forest. Here and there were the shanties of Canadian wood-cutters, whom the Shakers had sent to save what fuel they might from the general loss, and whom, at noonday, the pickers came upon, as they sat in pairs at their doors, with a can of milk between them, dusky, furtive, and intent as animals. From the first of the strawberries to the last of the blackberries, the birds and chipmucks feasted, and only stirred in short flights when the young Shakeresses, shy as themselves, invaded their banquet.

"Why, Egery," said one of them, the first day, "you empty your basket faster than any of us, and you said you never picked before. How do you always find such full vines? I do believe it's because they know you *love* to pick 'em so, and they just give you a little wink."

"Yes," she answered absently, like one entranced by the rich influences of the time and scene. She drank of the strong vitality of the earth and air and sun, and day by day the potion showed its effect in the serenity of her established health.

"Oh, nothing in the weather hurts *her*," said the girl who had surprised her secret understanding with the berries. "She keeps on with the birds and squirrels when the heat drives us off, and if it comes on to rain it runs off her as if she was a chipmuck or a robin; and next morning, when I 'm as full of aches and pains as I can hold, she 's all ready to begin again."

"Yee, that 's so, Elizabeth," said the others, who laughed at this.

In their way they mingled what jollity they could in their work, and were sometimes demurely freakish in the depths of their poke-bonnets and under the wide brims of their hats. Certain of the elder brethren and sisters had their repute for humour, and made their quaint jokes without a bad conscience; while the younger played little pranks upon one another, with those gigglings and thrusts and pushes which accompany the expression of rustic drollery, and were not severely rebuked. Egeria did not take part in their jocularities; but it was another joke of the young Shakers and Shakeresses, kept children beyond their time and apt to allege children's excuses when called to account, to say, "She made us do it—she looked so!"

They all liked her, and in spite of the secular fashion of her dress, to which she still clung, they treated her as if she were one of themselves, and were always to stay with them. Whatever may have been in their hearts, nothing in their manner betrayed surprise at the complete abeyance into which her supposed supernatural gifts had fallen. Perhaps, as people used to supernaturalism, to the caprice with which the other world uses this, they could be surprised at no lapse or access of divination, in any given case. At any rate, they all seemed content with her robust return to life and health, and if they were impatient for proof of the great things that her father had claimed for her, none of them showed impatience.

There were certain other faculties as dormant in her as her psychological powers. Once, as she passed through the pine-woods where Laban had first found her and her father, he leaned across Sister Frances, who sat between them on the wagon-seat, and asked, "Do you know this road?" And when they came to that knoll beside the brook he asked again, "Do you mind this place?" He laughed when she said no. "Well, I don't much wonder. You didn't

seem to be quite in your right senses. This is the place where I come across you and your father that day."

At another time, when a different course brought them home by the Elm Tavern, she dimly recalled the aspect of the house, and asked what it was. "It seems as if I had seen it in a dream," she said.

"Must ha' had the nightmare pretty bad," returned Laban. "It 's a dreadful place."

"Dreadful," repeated Sister Frances. "But it 's just so when you 're comin' down with a fit of sickness, especially fevers. Everything seems in a dream, like."

Sister Frances rejoiced like a mother in the girl's health, which came back to her in no ethereal quality, but in solid evidence, in colour and in elasticity of step and touch. She had known her before the fever only in that brief interval in which all her faculties were invested by the disease; and both the spiritual and material change wrought in her by convalescence might well have appeared greater than they were. She had seen her lie down a frail and fearful girl, deeply shadowed, as she fancied, by the memories of a troubled past; and she had seen her rise up and grow, in sympathy with the reviving year, into a broad, tranquil summer

of womanly ripeness and strength. To the homely mind of Sister Frances she was like the young maple which Brother Joseph had found in a sombre thicket of the woods, and had set out in the abundant sunshine of the village street before the office gate, where it had thriven in a single year out of all likeness to itself. She admired this tree, and in telling Egeria of her fancy she gave her a pin-cushion she had shaped in its image on the stem of a broken kerosene lamp; it was faithful, even to the emery bag in a red peak, like the first colour which the maple showed at top in the autumn.

When the garden berries began to ripen, the two often talked long together as they sat in the cool basement of the office, sorting them with Shaker conscientiousness, and packing for market only boxes of honest fruit. Then the elder woman tried with maternal tenderness to draw nearer the life of this daughter of her care, in the fond hope that she might always keep her, and not lose her again to the world from which she had wandered.

"You seem happy here, Egeria," she would say, timorously feeling her way toward what had already been talked of in the family; and then, when the girl answered

that she had never been so happy before, the sister's conscience gave her a check. It did not seem right to take advantage of Egeria's happiness among them to urge her to any step to which she was not moved by conviction. "You know," she resumed, "that we wouldn't like anything better than to have you stay among us,—you and your father both. All the family 's agreed about that. But it isn't for us to prevail without you feel a call to our life. What does your father say?"

"We have never talked much about it," said Egeria. "May be he is waiting for me to get well before he makes up his mind."

"Why, you look a great deal better than he does, now!" cried Sister Frances, bluntly. "I want you should both stay with us till he gets strong again. I don't think your father 's over and above strong when he 's well."

"Well?" echoed the girl. "Don't you think he 's well?"

"Yee," answered Sister Frances, "but nervous, worried, like. I suppose he hasn't had a chance yet to wear off the excitement of the world outside. You know you 've had a good fit of sickness. We all say that whatever happened before you came here, it 's dropped from you like a garment."

"Yes, like a garment," responded Egeria vaguely, letting her busy hands fall into her lap.

Frances took her by the arm. "Don't you go and be anxious, now, at what I said about your father."

"Oh, no!" said Egeria, recalling herself, and settling to work again.

"He 's as well as anybody need be. Only you 're so very well that anybody, to see you, would suppose you were the well one."

"I was wondering," mused the girl aloud, "if he had anything to perplex him. Sister Frances," she asked presently, "did any letter come for me while I was sick?"

"Nay. Did you expect a letter?"

"No," said Egeria, "there couldn't have been any answer." She blushed, and fell into a reverie so profound that Frances, working alone at the berries, knew not how to bring back the talk to the point from which it had strayed. She was not a person of much native tact, and the community life did not cherish tact among the virtues, counting truth much better; but now Sister Frances attempted a strategic approach.

"Sometimes," she said, "the young people who are gathered in have hopes in the world

outside that make it hard for them to conform to the true life. And we women, we all know what such hopes are. I was young, and the world looked very bright to me when I was gathered in."

"You, Sister Frances? You gathered in? I thought you were brought up in the family from a child."

"Nay, I was gathered in—when I was twenty."

"When you were twenty? And I am nineteen."

"I came to the neighbourhood on a visit, and one Sunday I went to a Shaker meeting, and I heard something said that made me think it was the true life. I used to be troubled about religion; but I 've had peace for many years. At first it was considerable of a cross, wondering whether I 'd acted for the best. He 'd never said anything to me, and I d' know as he ever would. But he might have. That was what kept preying on my mind, whenever I got lonesome or doubtful about my choice. But I was helped to put it away. He 's been here, since—with *her*. *That* was the most of a cross of anything. At first, he didn't know me, so I don't suppose he ever *did* care, much."

"Had you ever," said Egeria, in a sort of

scare, "done anything that could have made him think *you* cared?"

"Nay. I was too proud for that."

"But even if you had done such a thing—by a mistake, or by doing something you thought was right, and then you had been afraid he might take it differently—you would have felt safe here?"

"Yee, I should have felt safe." Frances waited for Egeria to speak, but the girl was again silent. "I did hope," resumed the sister, "in those young and foolish days, that he might be gathered in too. Then we could lived in sight of each other. But it wa'n't to be, and I don't know as 't would been for the best. Any rate he got married. I 've heard they live out in Illinoy, and 't he 's made out real well. And I 'm at rest, here."

"Sister Frances," said Egeria, "do you think my father looks sick?"

"Well, I declare, if you ain't thinkin' of that silly talk of mine, yet! Anybody 'd look sick alongside of you. I only meant that he was a little more peaked."

"Yes," responded the girl, with a sigh, "he doesn't look well."

She watched him at dinner, that day, and saw that he had a small and fastidious appe-

tite, though the abundance of a Shaker garden was there to tempt him. "Are you feeling well, father?" she asked, when they went out after tea for a little stroll. "You ate hardly anything at dinner, and this evening you didn't touch your tea."

"Yes," he answered quickly, with a touch of irritation, "I am well; very well; perfectly well. But the hot weather is trying, and—and"—

"And what?" coaxed the girl. "Have you been thinking about something that worries you? Is there anything on your mind?"

"No, no. Nothing. Have you ever noticed it before? What has made you notice it?"

"I don't know. Sister Frances said she thought you didn't look as well as I do. That seemed strange."

"*You* are looking very well, Egeria. I am glad to see you looking so well. This fund of physical strength ought to contribute — There is nothing that is necessarily alien in it to— I am truly glad for your sake, my dear, that you are so well."

They were walking down the sloping roadside from the office gate toward the clump of old willows in whose midst stood the spacious

stone bowl, scooped out of the solid granite by some forgotten brother in former years, and now tenderly, darkly green inside and out, with a tint of cool mould. When they reached the bank beside the trough, he dropped wearily on the grass, but she remained standing, with her arms sunken before her and her fingers intertwined, watching the soft ebullition of the spring in the centre of the bowl. Either she had not been aware of his approach to the matter of their tacit avoidance or she was indifferent to it. A smile played upon her face as the bubble continually rounded itself without breaking upon the surface of the water; and in the mellow light of the waning day she looked strong and very beautiful. Her hair was darker than before her fever; her eyes had lost their look of vigilance and apprehension, and softly burned in their gaze; the sun and wind had enriched her fair Northern complexion with a tinge of the South. An artist or a poet of those who dream backward from fable might have figured her in his fancy as the Young Ceres: she looked so sweet and pure an essence of the harvest landscape, so earthly fair and good.

Her father glanced at her uneasily. "I

don't like my environment, here," he broke out. "I am conscious of adverse influences."

She slowly lifted her eyes from the fountain, and looked at him with gravely smiling question, as if she had not quite understood.

"You asked me just now," he resumed, "whether I had been thinking about *any* vexatious matter. Have you seen nothing here of late to vex me?"

"No," she answered, with the same question, but without the smile.

"Nothing in the attitude of these people?"

"Their attitude?"

"I have tried to believe," he said vehemently, "that it was my fancy; but I can't be mistaken. They regard me with distrust; they have withdrawn from me the sympathy upon which I was placing all my hopes of success. No, no," he added, seeing her about to speak in refutation, "I am right, I feel it, I know it."

"They seem kinder to me than ever," Egeria ventured.

"They *are* kinder to you," returned her father. "They are distinguishing between us. They wish to keep you and to cast me out."

Egeria looked incredulous. "But how

could they do that? Nothing could separate us!"

"I am glad to hear you say that," said her father, huskily. "There have been times of late when I thought—when I was afraid— You have seemed indifferent"—

"Father!"

"I know that I wronged you." He turned his face, and they were both silent, till Egeria spoke.

"If what you think is true, we must go away. Where will we go? Shall we go home?"

"No, I can't go there. It 's impossible."

Egeria did not reply directly, but after a while she said, "Father, do you ever think of Mr. Hatch?"

"No. Why should I think of him?"

"He lent us money, and he expected to find us at home when he got back."

"His loan could scarcely have paid the debt he was under to me. I regarded it in that light, and so did he. We had no obligation to be where he expected to find us."

"No; but if he went there, and didn't find us, it would make grandfather very anxious."

"I 'm not obliged to preserve your grandfather from anxiety. He hasn't known our

movements since we left home. But I do care for Mr. Hatch. I will write him, and tell him where we are. Where was he going?"

Egeria turned a little white. "I—I don't know," she faltered. "I can't remember. Wait! Yes—he gave me his address, and I —I can't think what I did with it."

"Perhaps you put it in your bag with the money."

"Yes—I did. I put it in my bag. It 's gone. Everything about that time seems so dim, so" —

"It 's no matter; not the least," said her father. "He probably hasn't returned to the East. When he does, he can readily find us out." Egeria looked grieved and troubled, but he hurried on to say, "The great question is how to bring about the results—the important results—for which I came here. I will not be driven from conditions which I thought so favourable, without an effort. Their leading men may turn against me if they choose; it is their peril and their loss; but the great mass of the community will be with me in any collision."

"Why, what makes you think there is a feeling against you, father, in any of them?"

"Do you remember that day in the orchard when you first went out? Joseph and I had

some words, in which he showed plainly what had been fermenting in his mind, when he intimated the subordination of spiritualism to Shakerism. I understood his drift, though at the time I said nothing. Afterward the matter dropped; but within a few days I have been made to feel very distinctly a sphere of opposition. They think, the leading men, that my utilisation of their conditions will undermine their whole system. And so it will. Their system is unnaturally and ridiculously mistaken; next after their spiritualism, their communism is the only thing about them that is fit to survive. Their angelic life, as they call it, is an absurd delusion, the dream of a sick woman."

"Oh, I hope you won't do anything to break up their life!" cried the girl, in simple trust of his power. "They have been so good to us."

"Their system may remain, for all me," returned her father. "Even in riding down the opposition to me, I shall be careful of their rights. Egeria," he said, "you must have observed that during your long convalescence I have spared you all discussion of this matter?"

"Yes," she admitted, apprehensively.

"I noticed that it seemed to irritate you,

—to cost you an effort of mind and of will, which I was unwilling to tax you with till you had regained your full strength. The delay has been very irksome to me. I felt that we were losing precious time—that we were being placed in a false position; the waiting has worn upon me, as you see." He looked even haggard in the coming twilight. He had lost flesh, and two loose cords hung where his double chin had been. "The question now is whether you will be ready when I call upon you for the test which I am impatient to make."

Egeria sank down upon the bank not far from him, and pulled weakly at a tuft of grass. "I was in hopes," she said sadly, "that you had given it up, father."

"Given it up!" he cried in amaze.

"Why couldn't we wait?" she asked.

"Wait? Till when?"

"Till we are dead. Then we shall know whether there is any truth in it all. It will be only a little while at the longest."

"A little while!" exclaimed the doctor indignantly. "We may live to be a hundred! There are people in those houses yonder,"—he indicated the dormitories with a wave of his hand,—"who have had everything to kill them in their prime; who came here

with the women who were to be their wives, or who left husband and children and home to embrace this asceticism; who for scores of years have had the memories of these to brood upon in their withered hearts. We can't wait for death. We have a right to know the truth from life."

They had so often talked of this deep concern as knowledge to be acquired that probably neither of them found anything grotesque or terrible in this phase of the discussion. Egeria now only urged vaguely, "We have the Bible."

"Yes," rejoined her father, bitterly, "the Bible! the book with which they try to crush our hopes! the record, permeated and saturated with spiritualism from Genesis to Revelation, by which they pretend to disprove and forbid spiritualism! Shall one revelation suffice for all time? Shall we know nothing of the grand and hopeful changes which must have taken place in the world of spirits, as in this world, during the last eighteen hundred years? Are we less worthy of communion with supernal essences than those semi-barbarous Jews? Let us beware how we refuse the light of our day, because the light of the past still shines. Shines? Flickers! In many it is extinct.

How shall faith and hope be rekindled? Egeria, you must not try to argue with me on this point. You must submit yourself and your power implicitly to me. Will you do so?"

"I don't know what you mean by my power. I have no power."

"You have power, if you think you have. What I ask is that you will not oppose your will to mine."

"I will not oppose you," she answered in a low voice. A gush of tears blinded her, and dimmed the beautiful world. "You know how I have always hated this, father,—ever since I was old enough to think about it. A thing that seemed to be and seemed not to be,—it scared me! And when it all stopped I thought you wouldn't want to begin it again. But I will try to do whatever you ask me."

"I can't understand your repugnance," said her father. "If this power of yours should bring you face to face with your mother"—

"I never saw her,—I should not know her; and she would not know me for the little baby she left!" cried the girl desperately. "Besides, I can wait to go to her. And she can wait, too. I don't believe she

would ever come. What good does it all do? Oh, it 's dreadful to me!"

"The time has been, Egeria," rejoined her father, "when your attitude would have discouraged me. Now, it only gives me pain. I am convinced that your own opinions and ideas of the matter are of no consequence to the agencies operating through you. All that I ask of you is that you yield yourself passively to my influence. Will you do this?"

"Oh, yes, I will do all that I can. Oh, I wish I had died in the fever!"

"You talk childishly," said her father. "How do you know that death would have released you from your obligation to this cause? It may be your office in the next world, as it is in this, to be the medium of communication between embodied and disembodied spirits."

"Then I hope there won't be any other world."

Her father looked angrily at her as she rose and stood beside the rustic fountain. One of the Shaker boys, uncouth in his wide straw hat and misshapen trousers, came by with some cows from pasture, and they stopped to drink from the great stone bowl. The voices of bathers in the river half a mile away floated sad across the intervening space

of meadow land. The air was so heavy with dew that the rumble of a distant railroad train was as clear as if near at hand in the valley which the sound even of the steam whistle seldom visited. As Egeria and her father walked back to the office the crickets trilled along the path. The smell of the prosperous gardens beyond the wall came to them, and mingled with the thick, sweet scent of the milkweed by the wayside.

There was a little group before the office door. At the foot of the steps stood Humphrey, and with him Joseph and Elihu; Diantha and Rachel were seen within the door-way, and Frances sat on the threshold. They were talking earnestly; at sight of the doctor and Egeria they lowered their voices, and as they drew near they ceased speaking altogether, with the consciousness of sincere people interrupted by those of whom they have been speaking. At the same time Sister Frances made room upon the step, and beckoned to Egeria with more than her usual fondness,—with a sort of tender reparation and defiance. The girl took the place, and her father remained standing with the other men.

It plainly cost Elihu an effort to break the silence, but he said after a moment, "Have

you seen the account of the exposure of that materialisation medium out in St. Louis?"

"No," said the doctor; "but nothing of that sort surprises me. It is too soon yet for successful materialisations, and all attempts at it are mixed with imposture."

"There 's quite a long account," rejoined Elihu, "in yesterday's *Tribune*."

He made a movement to take the paper out of his breast pocket. "I don't care to see it," said the doctor abruptly; "I can very well imagine it. Those things are sickening. Some wretched creature—a woman, I suppose—trying to eke out her gift by cheating, to get her bread. It rests with you Shakers to rescue this precious opportunity from infamy. But you must take hold of it in no half-hearted way."

"What do you mean?" asked Elihu.

"You have the conditions here of perfect success, as I heard you boast when I first saw you in the Fitchburg depot at Boston. You are released from all thought of the morrow; the spectre of want that pursues other men does not dog your steps; you have neither wife nor husband nor child to cling about your hearts and weaken your will to serve the truth with absolute fidelity. Your discipline has rescued you from the vanity of

making men wonder. There is nothing to prevent you from developing a perfect mediumship amongst you."

"You imply," rejoined Elihu, with warmth, "that we have failed of our duty in this respect. You don't seem to realise that our very existence is a witness to the truth of an open relation between the spiritual and the material worlds. As a people we had birth in the inspired visions of Ann; the very hymn we sang yesterday was breathed through our lips by angelic authority; the tradition of prophecy has never been broken with us. We gave spiritualism to the world."

"Yes, you gave spiritualism to the world," retorted Boynton, "to mock its hopes and baffle its aspirations and corrupt its life. You flung it out a flaming brand, to be blown upon by cupidity and lust and ambition, till its heavenly light turned to an infernal fire, while you remained lapped in your secure prosperity, counting your gains; adding acre to acre, beef to beef, sheep to sheep; living the lives of clowns and peasants on week days, and on the Sabbath dancing before the Lord, for the amusement of the idlers who come to your church as they go to a circus."

"Friend," interrupted Elihu warningly, "you are abusing our patience!" The other

Shakers looked shocked and alarmed, and Egeria rose to her feet.

"I *mean* to abuse your patience. I mean to sting you into life. I mean to make you think of your heavenly origin, and realise how unworthy you have grown. You have subordinated your spiritualism to your Shakerism"—

"Spiritualism was never anything but a means to Shakerism," angrily retorted Elihu.

"I would make it the *end* of Shakerism. How has it profited you as a means?" demanded Boynton.

"It has made us what we are. It gave us a discipline and a rule of life, because it descended, unasked, from heaven. But your secular spiritualism which you want to have us take up, and which has continued through solicitation and entreaty, has given you no code of morality. It has been a vain show, making men worse and not better, and tempting them to all manner of lies. And you wish us to take it up at the point to which the world has brought it? Nay! You wish us to subordinate the angelic life, and the good that has crowned it, to the mere dead means? Nay! To value the staff by which we have climbed, and not the height we have reached? Nay! Prove first that in your

hands it has not become a stock to conjure with,—to be cast on the ground and turned into a serpent for a wonder before Pharaoh and a confusion of true prophecy,—and then we will take it up again."

The men's faces had grown red, and they approached each other angrily.

"You have deceived me!" cried Boynton. "You led me to believe that among you I should find the sympathy and support which are essential to success."

"We led you to believe nothing," retorted Elihu. "An accident threw you among us, after we had fully and fairly warned you that we should not receive you or any one without deliberation. We welcomed you kindly, and you have had our best."

"Elihu, Elihu!" softly pleaded Sister Frances, "it isn't for us to boast of our good deeds." The others silently looked from him to her.

"There is no vainglory in the truth, Frances," answered Elihu, severely. "We have been assailed with unjust tauntings."

"And I," said Boynton, "have been provoked to a harsher frankness than I meant to use, by your indifference to an interest infinitely more vital than any rule of life; by a gradually increasing enmity here which

I have now felt for some time, and have struggled against in vain. There has been a withdrawal of confidence from me."

"You have no right to say that," Elihu promptly retorted. "The conditions remain precisely the same as when you first unfolded your plans to us in family meeting. We dealt plainly with you then, and we know nothing more of you now than we knew within two days after your arrival here. You made certain pretensions then, and you have fulfilled none of them. Instead of that, you come after nearly three months' time, and require us to lay aside our industries, and join you in a pursuit which has proved the vainest and idlest that has ever wasted the human mind."

"You have twice upbraided me, now," said Dr. Boynton, "with my failure to make good my claim to your confidence. You shall not upbraid me a third time. You knew why I was waiting. You knew that it was at a cost almost like life itself that I waited, and that I counted every hour of delay as a drop of blood wrung from my heart. But I will delay no longer. You shall have the proof now—at once—this very night. Call your family together. We won't lose another moment. Egeria!"

Egeria started: the quarrel—for it had

assumed this character—had begun so suddenly, and probably without intention or expectation on either side, though this is by no means certain; but she must have known whither it tended.

"You are right!" cried Elihu, with equal heat. "There is no time like the present. Matters have come to such a pass that something must be done."

"Call your family together!" repeated Boynton, defiantly.

"There is no need; this is the evening for family meeting," the Shaker rejoined.

In fact, while they had been disputing, a group of the younger Shakers and Shakeresses had formed about the door of the family house in which the meeting was to be held, and their voices, unheeded by the angry disputants and their listeners, had risen on the cool twilight air. At that distance the white dresses of the young girls, freshly put on for the evening worship, showed pale through the gathering dusk, and their singing, robbed of its shrillness, was the voice of that disembodied devotion which haunts dim cathedral arches, and in our bright New World sometimes drifts out of open church windows to the ear of the passer, taking his heart with an indefinite religious passion and yearning.

XV.

THE office sisters went in-doors to make some change in their dress for the meeting; Elihu and Joseph walked away together; Egeria had shrunk from the tearful embrace of Sister Frances, and she now slowly followed with her father, who continued in strenuous appeal to her, till they reached the door of the family house, and entered with the group awaiting them there. A dull look was in her eyes when they came into the hall, and she sank absent-mindedly into her usual place in one of the back rows of sisters, away from the light of the kerosene lamps burning in brackets against the wall. Her father, for reasons of his own, chose to sit apart from the men, and he now retired to one of the corners, where he remained with his head dropped on his hand during the greater part of the service.

Brother Humphrey did not join the rest till the meeting was nearly over. He had stayed to close up the office for the night,

and to wait for the return of Brother Laban, who was away on business, and he was about to lock one of the front doors, when he found himself confronted at the threshold by two men, one of whom asked if he could oblige them with a night's lodging.

"We do not keep a house of entertainment," said Humphrey, willing to evade, but unwilling to deny.

"Oh, I 'm perfectly aware of that," said the stranger, "but I suppose you don't turn people away. I was given to understand at the village, back here, that you sometimes took pity on wayfarers."

"Yee, we do," said Humphrey, still holding the door ajar.

"Then take pity on us, my dear friend, and on our horse," said the stranger, not otherwise indicating the vehicle he had left at the gate, "and we will pay you what you like for your compassion." He pushed in, and Humphrey mechanically setting the door wider his companion followed. "We can sleep in a double-bedded room, if you can't give us two single ones."

"Nay," said Humphrey, "you can have two single rooms. Sit down," he added, showing them into the office parlour.

"Ah, you double nothing, I suppose,"

said the stranger. "Thanks!" He dropped into a rocking-chair, but when Humphrey went out, to see that the rooms were quite ready, he sprang actively to his feet again and went peering about the room with the lamp which Humphrey had left on the table. He stooped down and examined the legs of this piece of furniture. "No! Evidently the Shaker conscience is against the claw-foot. Probably they regard it as but one remove from the cloven-foot. And I don't suppose there's such a thing as a brass-mounting of any sort in the building. But really, this bare wall with the flat finish isn't so bad; it's expressive of the bare walls and flat finish of Shakerism; an instance of what the Swedenborgians call correspondence. Look here, my dear fellow! Here is something very original—*ab*-original—in rugs. That's a good bit of colour." He seized upon one of the braided rugs on the floor and partly lifted it. "Look at this!"

"Oh, let it alone," said the other, with a yawn. He looked not very well, and he glanced at his feet with the weariness that despairs of ever getting to bed with such an obstacle as boots in the way.

"But you don't understand," persisted the first, clinging to the rug. "This must

be home-dyed. These yellows and reds— I was admiring your rug," he explained to Humphrey, who now reappeared. "It 's something uncommon in colour."

"Yee," said the Shakers; "we don't generally like our things so gay. Your rooms are ready."

"Ah, then we won't detain you," said the stranger; but he caught sight of the long clock at the lower end of the hall, into which they issued, and turned from going up-stairs to look closer at it, with his hand lamp. "This is good! Very good! A genuine Marm Storrs. A family heirloom, I fancy?"

"Nay, I don't know," said the Shaker, stopping half-way up the stairs; "it came here before I did. I don't know who brought it."

"You don't care for colonial bric-à-brac? But you should. It 's the only thing we can justly aspire to, this side of the water. You could pick up some nice things in the country. Have you a spinning-wheel?"

"Yee. But we don't use it. It 's cheaper to buy our linen."

"Of course. But you 've no idea how much character it would give that pleasant parlour of yours."

Humphrey answered neither yea nor nay. The other stranger, who had stalked upstairs past him, asked from the upper hall, "Which room is mine?" And when Humphrey pointed it out he entered and shut the door behind him.

"What singing is that?" asked his companion, as he paused again at the open window near the top of the stairs.

"It is our family meeting," answered Humphrey.

"Family meeting!" repeated the stranger briskly. "Would it be possible—could you allow a secular person like myself to look in a moment?"

"Nay," said the Shaker, composedly, without vouchsafing any explanation.

The stranger looked at him as if puzzled. "I couldn't go?"

"Nay," repeated Humphrey, as before.

"But really, I've heard of people attending your meetings, haven't I?"

"Yee."

"Then why can't I go?"

"This is a family meeting."

"Oh! Is this my room?"

"Yee. Good-night," he said, while the stranger was still hesitating at his doorway, and turned away; the latter then answered

his good-night, and went in, and Humphrey descended to his room below, where, after he had put up the strangers' horse, he busied himself restlessly in working at his accounts, till Laban raised the latch of the door.

"Laban," said Humphrey, "there are two strangers—young men—in the house, that I've just give rooms to. One of us has got to stay away from the meetin', I presume. It won't do to have 'em alone here, these times."

"Nay," said Laban, taking off his hat, and hanging it on its appointed peg before he sat down. "I will stay."

"I d' know 's I'd ought to let ye," rejoined Humphrey. "It 's a meetin' of uncommon interest; quite excitin', as you may say."

"Why, what 's the matter?"

"Well, Friend Boynton and Egery are goin' to give what they call a test see-aunts, I suppose. Mahters have come to a head, all at once,—I don't rightly know how. But Elihu and Friend Boynton, they got into consid'able of a dispute, just now; and Friend Boynton was tol'ble bitter, and spoke revilin's that seemed to kind o' edge Elihu on, and first we know they 'd cooked it up between 'em that the' wa'n't any time like

the present to prove whether spiritualism was better than Shakerism. I don't believe 't *she* more 'n half liked it, the way she looked."

"I don't seem to care anything about goin'," said Laban. "I 'll stay."

"Why, thank ye, Laban!" cried Humphrey, rising with an eagerness which betrayed itself, now that he had satisfied the scruples of conscience by setting forth the meeting in the most attractive colours, and giving Laban a free choice whether to go or stay.

When he came into the meeting Brother Elihu was on his feet, speaking. Humphrey softly crept to the place left vacant for him, beside Elihu, and sat down.

"I want," Elihu was saying, "that all the brethren and sisters here present should wish well to Friend Boynton in his experiment. He claims that it is necessary to his success that there should be no feeling of enmity or suspicion towards him, and if any of us have such feelings I hope they will try to put them aside. I shall try to do so, for my part, with all my heart. Hard words have just passed between Friend Boynton and me, and I am willing to own that I was hasty and wrong in much that I said. I

shall truly rejoice in all the success that he hopes for to-night."

He sat down, and a little stir passed through the rows of listeners. One of them began a hymn, and they sang it through, while Dr. Boynton waited with a face of haughty offence. When the singing ceased, he came forward from his corner, and stood between the rows of brothers and sisters.

"I thank Elihu," he said, without looking at him, "for his good intentions towards myself, and I freely acquit him for what he has said. I have myself nothing to withdraw and nothing to regret. Nor do I ask, in what I shall do to-night, any mood of especial assent or sympathy in you, or even of neutrality. I am not here to try an experiment. I am here to exhibit certain facts of psychological science, as thoroughly ascertained as the transmission of the electric current that bears your messages from Maine to California." He seemed to gather defiance from his rotund phraseology; he rang the syllables of the last word through the hall with a clarion hardness. "When I last stood here," he continued, "and addressed you upon this subject, I had to ask your patience. My daughter had fallen sick with a fever, of which no one could forecast the

event. She lived, and made a recovery which, though painfully slow, is complete; and she is once more fully *en rapport* with my purposes and wishes. We shall begin with some simple experiments in biology, or, as it was originally called, mesmerism; and we shall gradually proceed to a combination of this science with spiritism, in a union which it has been the end and aim of all my inquiries to effect, — which I have foreseen from the beginning as the only true development of perfect mediumship. All that I shall ask of *you*," said Dr. Boynton, with a certain emphasis on the last word, turning on his heel, so as to include all present in his glance of somewhat contemptuous demand, "is your strict attention and your perfect silence. Stay! I shall ask one of you to oblige me by setting a chair here, where all can see, and by lending me a handkerchief." His voice had fallen to the colloquial tone, and it touched something of its old suavity. But when Humphrey had set the chair, and Diantha had given him a folded handkerchief, he shook out the linen with a flirt, and called, with a sternness that startled all, "Come forward, Egeria!"

The girl rose from her place beside Sister

Frances, and slowly advanced, with the Shakeress beside her.

"Come forward alone!" commanded her father, and Frances shrank back into her seat again, while Egeria continued to advance, and took her place in the chair as he directed with a wave of his hand. Those who were nearest saw that she was very pale, and they spoke afterwards of a peculiar look in her face, "as if," they said, "the life had gone out of it." She was also thought to tremble, and she let her arms fall into her lap, with a long patient sigh that was heard all over the room, and that brought tears to the eyes of some.

Her father stood drawing the handkerchief through his hand. "We will begin, as I said, with some of the most elementary phases of mesmerism, and we will work up through these to its ultimation in clairvoyance, at which point of junction we will invoke the aid of spiritism, the science into which it merges, and we will then continue our inquiries in a dark séance. For the present the lights can remain as they are."

He came round in front of his daughter, and steadily regarded her. "Fix your eyes on mine," he said, as if addressing a stranger.

She obeyed, lifting her eyes with an effect

of mute appeal, while the corners of her mouth drooped.

"When I count three," continued her father, "your eyes will close. One, two, three."

Her eyelids fell, and she remained as if in a quiet sleep. Her father approached, and with a series of downward passes assumed to deepen the spell.

"Now," he said, turning to the intent spectators, "we will exhibit some well-known phenomena of this condition. The subject is in a complete mesmeric trance, and is entirely under my control. I can will her to remain in that chair, and she will have no power to rise. If I were simply in my own mind, without the utterance of a word, to will her to go to the house-top and fling herself down, she would instantly do so. If I willed her to put her hand in the flame of that lamp, she could not refuse; neither would she feel any pain, if I forbade her to feel pain. She sees, hears, tastes, feels, whatever I will. She has no being except in my volition, and I have not a doubt that, terrible as it may seem, if I were to will her death, she would cease to breathe."

His hearers had listened with interest that deepened at each successive assertion; at

the last a sort of moan ran through the ranks of the sisters. The brothers remained hardly less impressively silent.

"You can now easily understand," resumed Boynton, "what a tremendous engine, what a superhuman agency, such a power as that I exert must be in the development of a spirit medium. It is to this end that I have chiefly exerted it in the case of my daughter. My theory has been that the medium's obsession by spirits is often so thorough that mind and body alike succumb to their influence, and that the medium is thus so obscured as to be able to transmit no intelligible result. It is at this point that the mesmeric power, sterile in itself, and hitherto useless, comes to her rescue. It stays and supports her; it enables another to reinforce her will, and she receives a distinct and ineffaceable impression from the other world. I ask you to consider but for a moment the vast consequences to flow from such a development. I ask you to do this, not in your behalf or mine; for we *know*, by our converse with spirits, that we shall live hereafter,—that another world lies beyond this, in which we shall abide for ever. But you who dwell here, in the security, the sunshine, of this faith, have little conception of the doubt and darkness in which the

whole Christian world is now involved. In and out of the church, it is honey-combed with scepticism. Priests in the pulpit and before the altar proclaim a creed which they hope it will be good for their hearers to believe, and the people envy the faith that can so confidently preach that creed; but neither priests nor people believe. As yet, this devastating doubt has not made itself felt in morals; for those who doubt were bred in the morality of those who believed. But how shall it be with the new generation, with the children of those who feel that it may be better to eat, drink, and make merry, for to-morrow they die for ever? Will they be restrained by the morality which, ceasing to be a guest of the mind in us, remains master of the nerves? Will they not eat, drink, and make merry at their pleasure, set free as they are, or outlawed as they are, by the spirit of inquiry, by the spirit of science, which has beaten down the defences and razed the citadel of the old faith? I shudder to contemplate the picture. In view of this calamitous future, I, as a spiritualist, cannot refrain from *doing;* and I appeal to you, as spiritualists, to shake off this drowse of prosperity, this poppied slumber of love and peace, and buckle on the armour of action. What right

have you, I ask—what right have you Shakers to remain simply a refuge for the world's lame and halt and blind? This dream of perfect purity, of affectionate union, of heavenly life on earth, is very sweet; and I too have been fascinated by it. I too have asked myself why there should not be some provision in Protestantism, as there is in Romanism, for those who would retire from the world and dedicate themselves to humble industry, to meek communion with the skies, to brotherly love. But I tell you that this is all a delusion and a snare. On your purity rests the guilt of the world's foulness; on your union the blame of the world's discord; on your heavenly peace the responsibility of the world's hellish unrest. To you was first given, in this latter time, the renewed gospel of immortality, the evidence of spiritual life, the truth that matter and spirit may converse for the salvation of mankind. What have you done with this priceless gift? Have you cherished it, kept alight the precious jewel, to shine before the eyes of men; or have you flung it into the world to be trampled under foot by the swinish herd of sorcerers, who will yet turn again and rend you, unless you fulfil your duty? Every one of you here should become a

messenger of the truth, and devote himself and herself to its promulgation. Go forth into the world, though it leave your home desolate, and serve the truth! Or, better still, break up this outworn brotherhood, this barren union in which you dwell, a company of aging men and women, childless, hopeless, with whom their heritage must perish, and form with me on its ruins a new Shakerism,—a Shakerism which shall be devoted to the development of spiritistic science; which shall—which shall"—

He paused for the word, and brother Elihu suddenly rose. "I would remind Friend Boynton," he said, "that we are waiting to witness the mesmeric phenomena which he has promised us."

The brethren and sisters, who had been unawares drawn upward and forward by Boynton's eloquence, sank back into their seats, but some of the latter turned a reproachful glance at Elihu, in wonder that he could have the heart to interrupt the heroic strain. Then all eyes reverted to Egeria, who in the general forgetfulness had sat with her head drooping and her person dejected in a weary lassitude.

The doctor stopped, stared at Elihu, and caught his breath. He could not collect his

thoughts at once, or master his overstrung nerves; but when he regained his voice he said drily, "If you will do me the favour to look at your watch, I will show you the least of these phenomena."

Brother Elihu promptly took out his watch and held it in his hand.

"Egeria," said the doctor, "tell me the time by Elihu's watch."

The girl lifted herself like one peering forward, but her eyes were still closed. "The case is shut," she answered.

"That is true," Elihu declared. "I had shut it." He opened it.

"Look now, Egeria."

She remained in the same posture for some time. "I can't tell," she said at last. "I can't see."

The doctor smiled triumphantly. "Oh, I had forgotten to bandage your eyes. You can't see, of course, unless your eyes are bandaged." He bound the handkerchief, which he had continued to draw through his hand, over her eyes. "Now look."

"I can't see," repeated the girl.

Boynton laughed. "Really," he said, "I must apologise for having forgotten some essential conditions of these simpler phenomena. We had advanced so far beyond

them that I didn't recur to them at once in all their details. I can't, of course, will the subject to know what I don't know myself. If I were to guess at the time, she must necessarily repeat my guess." He went quickly to Elihu, and glanced at the watch; then returning to his place beside Egeria's chair, he looked off at a distant point and said, with a tone of easy indifference, "Well, Egeria, what time is it?"

The girl fell back into her chair, and putting up her hands took the bandage from her eyes, which she fixed upon her father's face in a passion of pity and despair.

"Let it go, Friend Boynton," said Elihu kindly. "There is no haste. Another time will do as well. Perhaps Egeria has not quite recovered."

"Yee," repeated one and another of the brethren and sisters, "another time will do as well."

"No," said Boynton, "another time will *not* do as well." He was strongly moved, but he made a successful effort to command his voice. "My daughter has been so habitually under my influence that I had not thought it worth while to go through the preliminaries we use with a fresh subject. But as a great interruption has taken

place during her fever, perhaps this has become necessary." While he spoke, he was searching in his different pockets. He continued bitterly: "I was once the possessor of a silver piece which I used in producing the mesmeric trance, but it would not be strange if I had parted with it in the distress which threw me upon your charity. If any of you happens to have a silver coin of any sort"—

Few of these simple communists often had money about them; and in those days of paper currency even the business men of the family knew very well that there was no silver in their pockets. If a silver coin was the indispensable condition of the mesmeric slumber, apparently Boynton stood on safe ground.

But with a quick "Ah!" he came upon the piece he was seeking in his pocket-book. He pressed it between his palms, keeping his eyes fixed upon his daughter's. Then he put it in her open hand, and bade her look at it without winking, till her eyelids fell. As they closed he softly removed the piece, and made a number of downward passes over her face. There was a pause, during which Boynton was about to say something to his audience, when

Egeria opened her eyes and rose from her chair.

"I can't, I can't!" she cried, pitifully. "I've tried, but indeed, indeed, I can't." She stood before him, wringing her hands, and longing to cast her arms about his neck; but the sternness of his reproachful face forbade her. He opened his lips to speak, but no sound came from them. One of the brothers nearest him thought that he tottered, and half rose, with outstretched hands, to support him. Sister Frances was already at Egeria's side; she drew her head down upon her shoulder with a motherly instinct, while a murmur of sympathy went through the house.

Boynton repelled the friendly hand extended towards him. "Let me alone," he said; "I can take care of myself." He turned about, and lifting his voice bravely addressed the meeting: "We have failed,—totally and completely failed, upon as fair a trial as I could have wished. I do not attempt to account for the result, and I cannot dispute any conclusions which you may draw from it in regard to ourselves." Elihu stood up. "Friend Boynton, we believe you are an honest man."

"Yee, we do!" was repeated from bench to bench.

"I thank you," replied Boynton, in a breaking voice. "Then I can ask you to let me say that our failure is a profound mystery to me, and belies all our past experience. I do ask you to believe this; I ask you to let me say it, and to let it remain with you as my last word. For myself, I cannot lose faith in the past and keep my sanity. But somehow I see that the power has passed from us. In any case our destiny is accomplished among you. We must go out from you self-condemned. Before we go, I wish to acknowledge all your kindness, and to ask your forgiveness for such words of mine as have wronged you. Come, Egeria."

The girl came forward to where her father stood, and he took her hand and passed it through his arm.

"You mustn't leave us, Friend Boynton," said Elihu. "We wish you to stay. We wish you to stay," he repeated, at a dazed look of inquiry from the doctor, "and take all the time that you want for your investigations."

"Yee, that is so," assented all the voices in the room successively. Brother Humphrey alone continued silent, and he was ordinarily so undemonstrative that his tacit dissent would hardly have been noticed, but

for his saying, before Boynton could collect himself for reply, "There ain't nothin' agin Friend Boynton but what he can clear up with a word to the Elders, and I jine with ye all in askin' of him to stay."

"What do you mean?" demanded Boynton, turning fiercely upon him. "If you know anything against me, I wish you to speak out."

Brother Humphrey, who could scarcely have meant to intimate any mental reservation, hastened to answer in alarm, "I ha'n't got any doubts of ye, Friend Boynton. I think just as the rest do. We'd believe *you*."

"Believe me about what? I insist that you speak out."

Humphrey looked at the faces near him for help, but there was only pity and surprise in them. "It ain't no time or place," he began.

"It is the very time and the very place," retorted Boynton. "There can be no other like it. I wish you to say what you mean before the whole family. There is nothing in my life which I wish secretly examined into. I absolve you from all your scruples, and I wish, I demand, I require, that you speak out."

Humphrey rose with a sort of groan. "I think," he said, "as much as any on ye that there ought to be forgivin' and forgettin', and I ain't one to bear resentment for revilin's that's been passed on Shakerism here to-night. But what I thought, if Friend Boynton was goin' to stay amongst us, he 'd ought to have a chance to clear himself. We all know what 's been flyin' about the neighbourhood here, and it ain't fair to us, and it ain't fair to him, to let it go without a word. I don't want he should feel that we 're tryin' on him, but I want him to know what 's said, for all I don't believe in breakin' a bruised reed."

"As I said before, if you have heard anything to my disadvantage, I wish you to speak out,—I demand that you shall speak out," said Boynton.

"I 'm *goin'* to speak out, now," returned Humphrey more steadily, "and it ain't for anything that Friend Harris said, although I think ye 'd ought to know what he did say."

"Who is Harris?" asked Boynton.

"He 's the landlord of the Elm Tahvern."

"What does he say?"

"Well," said Humphrey, with reluctance, "I think ye 'd ought to know. He says you wa'n't sober that mornin' at his house, and

he couldn't hardly git ye out." Humphrey turned very red, as if ashamed, and wiped his forehead with his napkin; Elihu and the brothers near him looked down, and a painful hush prevailed.

Boynton did not deign to notice this accusation. "And what does your friend Harris say of the occurrences attending our departure?" he demanded contemptuously.

"He ain't no friend of our'n, except in the scriptural sense," replied Humphrey, doggedly. "But he says the' wa'n't no occurrences. Just a flash of tol'ble sharp lightnin' and that 's all. The' wa'n't no raps, nor no liftin' o' table-tops, accordin' to his say."

"I am glad to have you so explicit," said the doctor, "and I think now I begin to understand the value of your family's generosity towards myself. Did your friend Harris say anything in aspersion of my daughter?"

"Nay," replied Humphrey.

"Then she probably remains as before in your estimation, and you would take her word against Harris's, highly as you value his testimony?"

"Nay, we don't value his testimony," interposed Elihu. "Your word is better than his. We believe you against him."

Boynton waved scornful rejection with his hand. "Oh, spare your flatteries, sir. *I* know what you think of *me*. But you would believe my daughter?"

"Yee, we would," answered the whole audience.

The doctor regarded them with a curling lip. "Egeria," he said quietly, "state to these people what occurred. Tell the truth." The girl was silent. "Speak!"

"Father!" she gasped, "I don't know. I have heard you say. But I was asleep and dreaming till that clap of thunder came."

"Then you remember nothing?"

"Oh, I can just remember our going into that house, and our coming out of it. I forgot everything,—I was beginning to be crazy with the fever. But don't mind,—oh, don't mind, father! They believe you,—they said they did. Oh, you *do* believe him, don't you?" she implored of all those faces that swam on her tears.

Boynton reeled, and again the compassionate brother started up to save him from a fall. "Don't touch me!" he cried harshly. "Is there anything else?" he demanded, turning to Humphrey.

Elihu rose with an air of authority. "This must stop now. It has been a painful sea-

son; but no one here thinks that these friends have done anything wrong, or said anything false. We believe them, and we welcome them, if they choose, to stay with us."

"Yee, we do!" The assenting voices included Humphrey's.

"You welcome us to stay amongst you!" cried the doctor, with intense disdain. "Do you think that after what has just passed here any earthly consideration could induce me to remain another day, another hour, under your roof?" He had his daughter's hand in his arm, and he proudly pressed it as he spoke, drawing himself to his full height. "So much for ourselves! As for the experiments in which we have so ignominiously failed, I have no personal regrets. It would have been a pitiful triumph at best, if we had succeeded before you, and I cannot believe that the principle, the truth, involved can suffer by our defeat. We are simply proved unfit means for its development,—nothing more. Were it otherwise, were I persuaded that our humiliation was destined to arrest, or more than slightly retard, the progress of this science in men's minds, then I should indeed regard this night as the blackest of my life, and should be ready to lay down that life in despair. But, no! It

is not given to any one weak instrument, mysteriously breaking in the presence of a few obscure and sordid intelligences, to obstruct the divine intention. In this ineradicable conviction, I bid you a final farewell."

He strode toward the door with his daughter on his arm. One of the elders said, meekly and sadly, "The meeting is dismissed," and the brethren and sisters dispersed to their different houses. Those of the office found themselves following Dr. Boynton thither. They apprehensively entered after him, dreading some fresh explosion, or some show of preparation for instant departure. But the rhetoric of his spectacular adieu had sufficed him for the present. He merely said, "Egeria, go to bed. You must be quite worn out. As for me, I can't sleep, yet. I will go out for a walk. Would you oblige me with a glass of water?" he asked politely, turning to Sister Frances. When she brought it, "Thanks," he said, and handed back the empty goblet with a bow.

"Do you think you'd better walk far?" tremulously asked Egeria.

The touch of opposition restored him to his sense of wrong and resentment.

"Go to bed, Egeria," he said severely, "and don't any one sit up for me. I can let

myself in at the side door when I wish to return."

He started away, but the girl put herself in his path to the door. "Oh, father! You won't go to see that man at the tavern, will you? Tell me you won't, or I can't let you go."

"Don't be ridiculous!" cried her father. "I have no idea of going to meet that ruffian. In due time I shall call him to account."

"Don't ye think, Friend Boynton," said Humphrey, with awkward kindliness, "that you'd better try to get some rest?"

In the swift evanescence and recurrence of his moods under the strong excitement, Boynton was like a drunken man. After publishing his resolution not to accept the hospitality of the Shakers for an hour more, he had walked passively to the office with them, and had bidden Egeria go to bed there, as if nothing had happened. At Humphrey's words, all his indignation was rekindled.

"Rest! No, sir! I will *not* try to get some rest. After what has passed, every offer of kindness from you is a fresh offence. You, Egeria, if you can close your eyes here, you are welcome. Doubtless you can. Your apathy, your total want of sympathetic response to my feelings and my will, may enable you to

do so. But till some other roof shall cover us, I want no shelter."

No one sought to detain him, now, and going quickly from the door he left them huddled in a blank and purposeless group together.

"Poor thing!" said Sister Frances, first breaking the silence, as she turned to Egeria. "Oh, poor child!" She tried to take the girl in her arms; but with a pathetic "Don't!" Egeria prevented her, and averted her quivering face. She went out of the room and up-stairs without a word or sound, but Frances creeping softly after, to listen at her door, heard her sobbing within the room.

XVI.

THE hot weather, with here and there a blazing day in June, flamed into whole weeks of unbroken heat before the middle of July. The business streets were observably quieter, and the fashionable quarters were solitudes. At the club windows a few elderly men sat in arm-chairs, with glasses of iced Apollinaris water at their elbows, and stared out on the Common; some young men, with their hats on (if they perished for it), stalked spectrally from room to room behind them. The imported *bonnes* with their charges no longer frequented the Public Garden; it was thronged with the children and the superannuated of the poor, and with groups of tourists from the South and West, who were finding Boston what so many natives boast it in winter, the most comfortable summer resort on the coast.

It was not Ford's habit to go out of town at all; for in his hatred of the narrow and importunate conditions of the village life

which he had left behind him with his earlier youth, he had become an impassioned cockney.

"If you are so bitter against the country," said Phillips, who was urging an invitation to the sea-side upon him, "why don't you try really to be of the town as well as in it? Why don't you try to be one of us? Why don't you make an effort to fit in?"

"I don't like fitting in; I like elbow-room," answered Ford. "Do you suppose I should be fond of the town if I were of it? I should have to be one of a set, and a set is a village. If I am in the town, but not of it, I have freedom and seclusion. Besides, no man of simple social traditions like mine fits into a complex society without a loss of self-respect. He must hold aloof, or commit insincerities,—be a snob. I prefer to hold aloof. It isn't hard."

"And you don't think you do it to make yourself interesting?" inquired Phillips.

"I think not," said Ford.

"People would as lief be pleasant to you as not. But it ends there. They're not anxious about you," suggested the other.

"I believe I understand that." Ford was sitting at his window in his deep easy-chair; and he had his coat off. "That's

what galls my peasant-pride. Suppose I went with you to this lady's house"—he touched with the stem of his pipe a letter which lay open on the table pulled near him —"and visited among your friends, the nobility and gentry; I should be reminded by a thousand things every day that I was a sham and a pretender. That kind of people always take it for granted that you feel and think with them; and I don't. You can't keep telling them so, however. And suppose I tried to conform: I should be an amateur among professionals. They have the habit of breeding and of elegance, as they understand it; I may have a loftier ideal, but I haven't discipline: I can't realise my ideal; and they do realise theirs,—poor souls! That makes me their inferior; that makes me hate them."

"Oh," said Phillips, "you can put an ironical face on it, but I suspect what you say is really your mind."

"Of course it is. At heart I am a prince in disguise; but your friends won't know it if I sit with my coat off. That would vex me." He took up the letter from the table, and holding it at arm's length admired it. "Such a hand alone is enough; the smallest letters half an inch high, and all of them

shrugging their shoulders. I can't come up to that. If I went to this lady's house, to be like her other friends and acquaintance I should have to be just arrived from Europe, or just going; my talk should be of London and Paris and Rome, of the *Saturday Review* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, of English politics and society; my own country should exist for me on sufferance through a compassionate curiosity, half repulsion; I ought to have recently dined at Newport with poor Lord and Lady Scamperton, who are finding the climate so terrible; and I should be expected to speak of persons of the highest social distinction by their first names, or the first syllables of their first names. You see, that's quite beyond me. 'And do bring your friend, Mr. Ford,'" he read from the letter mincingly, and laughed. "I leave it to your fertile invention to excuse me, Phillips."

He kindled his pipe, and Phillips presently went away. It was part of his routine not to fix himself in any summer resort, but to keep accessible to the invitations which did not fail him. He found his account in this socially, and it did not remain unsaid that he also gratified a passion for economy in it; but the people who said this continued

among his hosts. Late in the summer, or almost when the leaves began to turn, he went away to the hills for a fortnight or three weeks, providing himself with quarters in some small hotel, and making a point of returning to the simplicity of nature. In the performance of this rite he wore a straw hat and a flannel shirt, and he took walks in the woods with the youngest young ladies among the boarders.

The intervals between his visits he spent in town, where he was very comfortable. When he went to the places that desired him, he explained that he had been in Boston trying to get Ford away. "Oh, yes! Your odd friend," said the ladies driving him home from the station in their phaetons. Phillips must have known that they did not care either for his odd friend or for his own oddity in having him, and yet he rather prized this eccentricity in himself.

The people in Ford's boarding-house went their different ways. Mrs. Perham remained latest, for Mr. Perham's health had not yet allowed his removal. He had had two great passions in life: making money and driving horses. By the time he had made his money he had a touch of paralysis, and could no longer drive horses. This separated him

much from his wife, who liked almost as well as he to ride after a good horse (as it is expressed by people who like it), and whom, since she had been forced so much to books for amusement, he could not join. She read the newspapers to him, and she went with him to the theatres; but there they ceased to sympathise in their tastes, for she was not fond of swearing, and it was this resource which remained to Mr. Perham after the papers and the play.

The house filled up for the summer with those people from the West and South who found the summer in Boston so pleasant, and with other transients; but many of the rooms and many of the places at the table remained vacant, and Mrs. Perham and Ford looked at each other across long distances, empty, or populated only by strange faces. At last Mr. Perham was able to bear removal; his wife seized the occasion and hurried him away to the country. That left Ford alone with the strangers, and he rather missed the woman's hungry curiosity, her cheerfulness, and her indomitable patience under what a more sympathetic witness might have felt to be the hard conditions of her life. He clung to the town throughout July and far into August, with a growing restlessness. He

did not care for the heat, and he amused himself well enough when he found time to be amused. He made a point of studying the different excursions in the harbour and beyond it; he studied also the entertainments offered at the theatres, where the variety combinations inculcated in small audiences a morality as relaxed as their systems.

One Sunday he went to the spiritualist meeting in the grove by Walden Pond. Most of the spiritualists were at a camp-meeting of their sect further up the road, and the people whom he met seemed, like himself, vaguely curious. They were nearly all country-folk: the young men had come with their sweethearts for pleasure; there were middle-aged husbands and wives who had brought their children for a day in the woods beside the pretty lake. Their horses were tied to the young pines and oaks; they sat in their buggies and carryalls, which were pushed into cool and breezy spots. The scene brought back to Ford the Sunday-school picnics of his childhood, but here was a profaner flavour: scraps of newspapers that had wrapped lunches blew about the grounds; at one place a man had swung a hammock, and lay in it reading, in his shirt-sleeves;

on the pond was a fleet of gay row-boats, which, however, the railroad company would not allow to be hired on Sunday. Ford found the keeper of the floating bath-houses and got a bath. When he came out the man, with American splendour, refused to take any money; he said that they did not let the baths on Sunday, but when he saw a gentleman he liked to treat him as one. "I hope you 're not mistaken in my case," said Ford sadly; and the bath-man laughed, and said he would chance it. Another of the people in charge complained of the dulness of the place. "What you want is a band. You want a dance-hall in the middle of the pond, here; and you want a band." They pointed out the auditorium in a hollow of the hills beyond the railroad track, where at the hour fixed for service he found the sparse company assembled. A score of listeners were scattered over the seats in the middle of the pavilion; outside, two young fellows who had come by the train leaned against the columns and smoked, with their hats on; a young girl in blue, with her lover, conspicuously occupied one of the seats under the trees that scaled the amphitheatre, worn grassless and brown by drought and the feet of many picnics; there

were certain ladies in artificial teeth and long linen dusters whom Ford fixed upon as spiritualists, though he had no reason to do so. A trance-speaker was announced for the Invocation; he came forward, where the fiddlers sat when there was dancing, and, supporting himself by one hand on the music-stand, closed his eyes and passed into a trance of wandering rhetoric, returning to himself in a dribble of verse which bade the hearer, at the close of each stanza,

"Come, then, come to Spirit-Land."

The address was given by another speaker, who declaimed against the injustice of the world towards spiritualism and boasted of the importance of its Unfoldments. He sketched its rise and progress, and found an analogy between the "first lisping of the tinny rap at Rochester" and the advent of Christ, whom he described as the "infant Reformer in the man-ger," and again as our "humble elder brother." The people listened decently, and but for the young fellows with their cigars were as respectful as most country congregations to what was much duller than most country preaching. Ford came away before the end, and climbing the side of the amphitheatre encountered

Mr. Eccles, who was also about to go. He shook hands with Ford, and on his present inquiry said that nothing had been heard of the Boyntons since the spring. He expressed a faded interest in them. He asked Ford if he had seen the experiments in self-expansion and compression of the new medium, Mrs. Sims. He viewed these experiments as the ultimation of certain moral fluctuations in the spiritual world, for if there was a steady movement either outward or inward in that world, Mrs. Sims might expand or might condense herself, but it stood to reason that she could not do both.

Ford came home with a headache; when he woke, the next morning, the long window danced round the room before it settled to its proper place. He was not in the habit of being sick, and he suffered some days with this dizziness before he saw a doctor. Then he asked advice, because the sickness interfered with his work.

"Go away somewhere," said the doctor. "It's indigestion. Get a change of air."

"Do you mean the sea-side?" asked Ford.

"I don't call that a change of air from Boston. Go to the hills."

Ford reflected a moment in disgust. He

could have endured the sea-side. "Any particular direction?"

"No. Go anywhere. Go to the White Mountains. Take a tramp through them."

"I'd rather take medicine," said Ford. "Give me some medicine."

"Oh, I'll give you all the *medicine* you want," said the doctor; and he wrote him a prescription.

Ford went home, and took his medicine with the same scepticism, and tried to keep about his work. The lectures which he had been attending were over long ago; but he had found a chance to do some study with a practical chemist which he was loath to forego; and he had his pot-boiling for the press. But his mind feebly relaxed from the demands upon it, and at last it refused to respond at all. He lingered a week longer in town before he would suffer himself to act upon the doctor's advice, and when at last he forced himself to submission it was the end of the month. As regarded such matters he was a man of small invention, and he was at a loss how to go, when he had made up his mind to it. He would have been glad of Phillips's determining counsel, but the time had now come for Phillips's annual return to nature, and he would be far from Boston and

the North Shore. On his way to buy a Guide, Ford saw in the window of a railroad agency the advertisement of a route to the White Mountains, and he advised with the ticket-agent, who took no more interest in the matter than Ford himself, about getting a ticket over his line. It led first to Portland, and then, as the agent indifferently pointed out on the map, went straight to the mountains, with a bold, broad sweep, while rival routes, in spidery crooks, zig-zagged thither with a preposterous, almost wanton indirectness. Ford stood sadly amusing himself, first with the immense advantage of this line over all competitors, and then with the names of the towns near Gorham in New Hampshire, and in the adjoining region of Maine: Milan, Berlin, Success, Byron, Madrid, Avon, New Vineyard, Peru, Norway, Sweden, Industry, Paris, Carthage,—names conjecturably given at hap-hazard, or in despair, or out of humorous recklessness, as names are given to dogs and horses. He wondered whether Dr. Boynton came from Byron or Carthage, or perhaps a little further off, from Cornville or Solon. He stood so long before the map that the agent lost his patience, and turned to his books; and Ford came away at last without buying a ticket.

At home he found a visitor whom his sick and dazzled eyes identified after a while as Phillips. "Hallo!" he said. "I thought you were somewhere in the country."

"Theoretically I am in the country," Phillips admitted, "but practically 'I am here,'—as Ruy Blas says." He neatly imitated the accent of the late Charles Fechter in pronouncing the words. "It occurred to me, before committing myself to the country irretrievably, that I would stop in Boston and try to commit you with me."

"Who told you I was sick?" asked Ford, with displeasure.

"Nobody. If I knew it, I divined it. If you are sick, so much the better. My plan is just the thing for you. I am going to drive in a buggy to Brattleboro', where I underwent the water cure—for my first passion. It was a great while ago. I want you to come, too."

Ford shook his head stupidly. "The doctor said the White Mountains."

"Yes, White Mountains, Green Mountains; it's all one. It's air that you're after. All you want is change of air. This journey will make another man of you. It's to be a journey for the sake of going and coming; and we will loiter or hurry on the way, just as we like. Come! I've planned

it all out. It 's to be an affair of weeks. I propose to make it an exploration,—a voyage of discovery. I wish to form the acquaintance of my native State, and of those men and brethren, her children, who have never left the domestic hearth. You had better come. It will be literary material to you, and money in your pocket. I thought of striking for Egerton, and looking in on the Perhams there, first; but we ought to stop on our way at Sudbury to see the Wayside Inn; and I must deflect a little to show you Concord, and the local history and philosophy; there are Shakers and all sorts of novelties at Vardley and Harshire; beyond Egerton is Princeton, with its Wachusett Mountain; and after that there is anything north-westwardly that you like; I haven't the map by me. My mare is pining on the second floor of her stable, and would ask nothing better than to form a third in our party."

"Oh, I'll go with you," said Ford listlessly.

"Good!" cried Phillips. "This is the fire of youth. If we get sick of it, we can send the mare back from any given point, and take to the rails. That is one of the advantages of having rails. It makes travel

by the country roads a luxury, and not a necessary. I fancy we shall feel almost wicked in the pursuit of our journey, — it will be such unalloyed pleasure."

Phillips's mare was the remains of an establishment which he had set up some years before. It had included a man and a coupé, and he had relinquished these because of their expensiveness. The man, especially, had been unable to combine the advantages of outside man and inside man; he made Phillips's lodgings smell of the mare, and he made the stable smell of Phillips's wine. The man was paid off and sent away, and the coupé was sold at auction; but with a conservative unthrift that curiously combined with his frugal instincts, Phillips had suffered the mare to linger on his hands. Sometimes he took her out for exercise from the club stable, where he had lodged her; but he had intervals of forgetfulness, in which the club-groom found it his duty to warn him that the mare's legs were swelling. She was consequently boarded out of town a good deal, and Phillips awoke to her possession only when the farmers' bills came in. At these times he said he should sell that mare.

Like men who are rarely out of sorts, Ford

was eager to be well at once, and he chafed under Phillips's delays in getting off. But the latter, having secured Ford's company, began to arrange the details of their journey with minuteness, and it was several days before they started. Their progress had then even more than the promised slowness. Phillips was intent not only upon the pleasure of the journey, but also upon the search for colonial bric-à-brac, and this began as soon as they struck the real country beyond the suburban villages. All that was colonial was to his purpose, from tall standing clocks to the coarsest cracked blue delft: spinning-wheels, andirons, shovels and tongs, claw-footed furniture, battered pewter plates, door-latches and door-knockers, tin-lanterns, fiddle-back chairs—his craze generously embraced them all. He did not buy much, but he talked as long over what he left as what he took. He was not the first connoisseur who had visited these farm-houses; the people sometimes knew the worth of their wares; in certain cases, he traced the earlier presence of rival collectors whom he knew. Ford had nothing to do but to note the growth of the bargaining passion in the wary farm-wives. There were some who would sell nothing, and some had nothing they

would not sell, and they asked too much or too little with the same simplicity. What most struck him was the entire rusticity of their thought and life. Off the lines of railroad, and out of the localities frequented by summer boarders, the people were as rural, within fifteen or twenty miles of Boston, as they would have been among the Vermont or New Hampshire hills. But the country was itself occasionally very wild, especially as they got southward in Sudbury, among overflowed meadows and long stretches of solitary pine-woods. The sparse farm-houses and the lonesome villages afflicted him with the remembrance of his own youth; whatever his life had been since, it had not been embittered with the sense of hopeless endeavour, with the galled pride, with the angry ambition, which had once made it a torment in such places. But when they chanced upon some bit of absolute wilderness his heart relented towards the country; his jealous spirit found no more intrusion there than in the town; and he liked the wild odours, the tangle of vegetation, the life of the sylvan things. A hawk winging to covert under the avenging pursuit of small birds, a woodchuck lumpishly skurrying across an open field, the chase of chipmucks

and squirrels along the walls, were sights that touched a remote and deep tenderness in his breast. As they drew near the old inn, which was the first monument Phillips had proposed to inspect, it was late in the afternoon, and the landscape grew more consolingly savage. No other house was near enough to be seen, and they approached the storied mansion through a long stretch of pine and sand, by a road which must be lonelier now than it was a hundred years ago. They dismounted under the elm before the vast yellow hostelry, and explored its rambling chambers: they saw Lafayette's room and Washington's room; the attic for the slaves and common folk; the quaint ball-room; the bar; the parlour where Longfellow and his friends used to sit before the fire that for ever warms the rhyme celebrating the Wayside Inn. They found it not an inn any more, though it appeared from the assent of the tenant that they might command an elusive hospitality for the night. The back-door opened upon the fading memories of a garden, and the damp of late rains struck from it into the sad old house.

"It would be delightful," Phillips said, "to stay, but I think we must push on to Sudbury for the night." He lingered over

an old chest of drawers in the dining-room; not claw-footed, certainly, but with a bulging front, and with some fragmentary relics of its former brasses. But, "It has carried antiquity to the point where it ceases to be a virtue," he sighed at last. "It might be re-created; it couldn't be restored."

At Sudbury Village they found that there was no inn; though provision was occasionally made for wayfarers at the outlying farm-houses. They could be lodged in that way, or they could return for the night to the tavern at Wayland where they had dined. It was now twilight. "I think it will give an agreeable flavour of hardship to our adventure if we push on to Concord," said Phillips, and Ford willingly consented. They were no better assorted than ever in their strange companionship; but they had a good deal of talk. Phillips was volubly philosophical; and Ford, under the stimulus of the novelty, was more than commonly responsive, and pointed his comment, as was very unusual in him, with bits of his own history and observation. But the next day, after looking over Concord together, and making their start upon an early dinner, they had almost as little to say to each other as the tramps they met on the road, who had

the air of not wishing to be disturbed in their meditations upon burglary and arson. They gave up their plan of stopping over night with the Harshire Shakers, and pushed on as far as Vardley instead, where they trusted to finding shelter in the community. They could spend the next morning there, Phillips said, and dine at Egerton; and Ford assented to anything.

XVII.

BOYNTON had passed the night wandering up and down the roads, and trying to puzzle out the causes of his discomfiture. Towards morning he had gone as far as the Elm Tavern and walked to and fro before it a long time, debating whether he should go in and confront the landlord with his lie. The house was brilliantly lighted upon one side, where there seemed to be a hall running its whole length, and a sound of clattering feet and laughing voices, mingled with the half-suppressed squeak of a fiddle, came out of the open windows. It was the landlord who was fiddling; Boynton recognised his tones in the harsh voice that called out the figures of the dance. From time to time a panting couple came to the door for breath. Several women came together, presently, and catching sight of Boynton, as he lurked in the shadow of the elms, one of them called out, "Lord, girls, there's a ghost!" and they all fled in-doors again with hys-

terical cries and laughter. The word thrilled him with hope: what he had declared in regard to the phenomena there must be matter of general belief in the neighbourhood. He stole away, borne forward as if on air by the tumult of cogitation that inflated his brain. He found himself, he knew not how, again on the long street of the Shaker village. The day was breaking, when he sat down near the granite bowl, still struggling hopefully for a clew to the mystery of his failure. His waking dreams began to mix with those of sleep, and an hour later Ford and Phillips, roused by a common foreboding of early breakfast, and strolling down the road a little for a glimpse of the village and a breath of the fresh morning air, halted at sight of this strange figure, clothed in Shaker habiliments, and with the broad-brimmed Shaker hat on the grass at its feet; the eyes were closed, and the head rested against the trunk of one of the willows. A chilly horror crept over Ford, who whispered, "Is he dead?" but Phillips had no emotion save utter astonishment.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "It's Dr. Boynton!"

At the sound of his name, Boynton opened

his eyes with a start, and sprang to his feet. He recognised them instantly, but he took no heed of Phillips as he launched himself upon Ford.

"You here! You here! You here!" he screamed. "Now I understand! Now I see! Where were you last night? Were you in this place, this neighbourhood, this region? I see it! I know why we failed, —why we were put to shame, destroyed, annihilated, in the very hour of our triumph! I might have thought of it! I might have known you were here! Did you hunt us up? Did you follow us? You have ruined me! You have blasted my life!"

With whatever wild impulse, he caught at Ford's throat, and clung to his collar, while the young man's iron clutch tightened upon either of his wrists.

"Let go, you maniac! If you don't let go, I'll" —

Boynton flung up his hands, and reeling several steps backward, fell. He struck heavily against the sharp rim of the stone bowl, and seemed about to fall into the water, but dropped at the base, motionless.

"My God, you've killed him!" shouted Phillips, as he stepped out from behind one of the trees.

"Go and get help!" Ford fell on his knees beside Boynton and searched his breast with a trembling hand for the beating of his heart; he put his ear to his mouth, and heard him breathe before he dipped his hand in the bowl, and dashed Boynton's face with the water. He was kneeling beside him, and lifting his head upon his arm, when he looked up and saw the anxious visages of those whom Phillips's clamours had summoned about them. Then Egeria had made her way through the circle. She pushed Ford away with an awful look, and stooping over her father caught up his head in her arms, and now swiftly scanned his face, and now swiftly pressed it against her breast, in those shuddering impulses with which a mother will see and will not see if her child be hurt.

The Shakers pushed a wagon down to the place where Boynton lay, and Ford afterward remembered helping to lift him into it.

"I'm glad you didn't strike him; I thought at first you had," said Phillips, as they followed the wagon back to the village.

"So did I," said Ford, mentally struggling to realise what had happened.

"What are they going to do, I wonder?" resumed Phillips, looking about him. "They ought to send for a doctor."

"Yee," said a Shaker at his elbow, whom neither of them had noticed, "we have sent."

The doctor came quickly; and Boynton, whom they had got into the infirmary upon the bed where Egeria had lain sick, began to show signs of consciousness. From time to time, scraps of hopeful report were passed through the group outside to Ford and Phillips on its skirts. When the doctor reappeared at last from within the infirmary, the brothers and sisters by twos and threes waylaid him in the yard and the street with anxious demand. The young men walking apart ambushed him further down the road.

"It 's a faint—I can't tell what it 's complicated with. He received some contusions in his fall—about the head. He 's an elderly man. He 's stout."

"Do you mean that he 's in danger?" Ford asked.

"Well, these apoplectic seizures are serious things for any one after thirty. Still it 's a slight attack—comparatively. The contusions—I 'm obliged to leave him for another patient just now. I shall be back again directly. Which of you is Mr. Ford?"

"My name is Ford."

"He wanted to know where you were. You a friend of his?"

"No. I met him in Boston this spring."

"Know his friends?"

"I don't."

"Get up!" said the doctor to his horse.

"If we knew any of his people," said Phillips, "I suppose we ought to telegraph."

"Yes," assented Ford.

"But, as we don't know them," continued Phillips, "what are we going to do?"

"I can't say." When they reached the office on their walk back, Ford went in, and left Phillips to get their horse put to. In a little while he came out again, and said abruptly, "I'm going to stay here. I can't say that I am responsible for the misfortunes of this man, but somehow I am entangled with him, and I can't break away without playing the brute. I've been talking with these people about Boynton. He's been trying some of his experiments here, and has failed. The thing happened last night, and I suppose that when he saw me, this morning, his mind recurred to his old delusion that I had something to do with his failure."

"I imagined as much," said Phillips, "from a remark that he made."

Ford frowned at the levity, and then continued. "That's all. I've explained to

their head men, here, as well as I could, what relation he fancied I had to him, and they understood it better than I could have expected; they 've seen enough of him to understand that his superstition about me would account for the assault. I 'm not bound to respect his mania, but I don't see how I can leave till I know how it goes with him." Phillips shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing. "The Shakers tell me that I can be lodged at a house of theirs down the road here. I must stay, and be of what use I can, though I don't *know* what. I 'll come away when I can do so decently."

"Oh, if you 're going in for decency," said Phillips, "I 've nothing to say. But that sort of thing can be carried too far, you know. Do you really mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then there 's nothing for me to say. But what do you expect me to do?" he asked, glancing at the horse, which was now brought up.

"I expect you to go on. There 's no reason why you should stay."

"No, I can't see how I 'm involved. And it 's a brisk drive to Egerton,—and breakfast. There 's no prospect of breakfast here, I suppose," he said, looking wistfully at the

office windows. "Well; if you've made up your mind, I shall be off at once. I'm sorry for our excursion."

"Yes, it's a pity for that," said Ford.

"It promised everything. Perhaps you could join me at Egerton, to-morrow?"

"Yes; if I can."

"I'll give you a day's grace. Then I shall push on to Brattleboro', and perhaps drop down this way with the falling leaf. I wish you'd write to me at Brattleboro', and let me know how the doctor gets on."

They shook hands. Ford pulled his bag out of the back of his wagon; and as Phillips drove off, he set out under the guidance of one of the brothers, to find his quarters in the house of which he had spoken. It had been the dwelling of a family of Shakers, which in the decay of their numbers was absorbed into the other branches of the community, and it stood half a mile away from the office, quite empty, but kept in perfect neatness and repair. He was given his choice of its many dormitories, but he preferred to have his bed set up in the meeting-room, which opened by folding-doors into an ante-room as large, and thus extended the whole length of the building. It was low-ceiled, but cool

currents of air swept through it from the windows at either end, and it was a still haven of refuge from the heat by night and by day. Hardly a fly sang in its expanse, dimmed by the shade of the elms before it; and it was indescribably remote from noise. The passing even of an ox-cart on the street before it was hushed by the thick bed of sand that silenced the road-way; and the heavy voice of the driver in hawing and geeing came like some lulling sound of animal life. A tenant of the Shakers lived in a farm-house across the way, and his wife had agreed to give Ford his meals and bestow what care his room needed; but these people were childless, and except for the plaintive lament of their broods of young turkeys pursuing the grass-hoppers through the ranks of sweet-corn, their presence involved hardly an interruption of the quiet.

Ford hung up some clothes in a closet, and after a hurried breakfast went again to the office. He found Boynton's doctor there with Humphrey and the sisters, and presently Egeria came in from another room with a slip of paper in her hand; her eyes were swollen with weeping, but she said in a low, steady voice, "This is grandfather's address."

"I don't want you to feel," said the doctor, "that the case is immediately alarming. There is no *necessity* for your grandfather's coming"—

"Oh, no! But I know that he would like to be told." She gave the slip of paper to Humphrey, and without looking at Ford went out at the door, and he saw her cross the street to the infirmary. There was some talk as to how this despatch should be sent, and Ford said he was going over to the village, and would carry it to the operator at the station. Outside, the doctor beckoned to him from his buggy, and said, "He has asked again if you were here. If he wishes to see you, you had better let him. Humphrey has told me what you explained to him. You can humour a sick man's whim, I suppose."

Ford really had another errand at Vardley; he wanted some ink and paper; for if he were to remain he must set to work as soon as possible. It was noon before he returned. With the lapse of time, that working mind, of which the operations are so obscure and incalculable, had unconsciously arranged its material in him, and when he sat down in his strange lodging he was able to put it all on paper, in spite of

the remote, dull ache of anxiety which accompanied his writing.

His tea was ready by the time the work was done, but with the revival of his restlessness, upon the conclusion of his task and the release of the faculties devoted to it, he slighted the meal, and hastily started with his copy to the post-office.

He was met there by the telegraph operator, who asked him to carry back to the Shakers the reply to the telegram he had sent. He saw that he must be already identified with the Boyntons in the village gossip; but he did not observe the kindly interest expressed in some words dropped by the operator, as he put the despatch into his pocket, and walked away with it.

There was a light in Humphrey's room at the office when he returned, and he carried the telegram in to him, and waited while the Shaker brought his lamp to bear upon the sheet. Humphrey remained reading it as if it were a long, closely-written letter.

"You don't know what it says?" he asked at last, looking up over his spectacles.

"Why, no," said Ford. "I had no authority to open it."

"I thought may be the telegrapher might told ye. It appears as if Friend

Boynton's father-in-law had been dead two months."

The despatch, which Humphrey handed to Ford, was signed by "Rev. Frederick Armstrong," who promised that he "would write."

"I suppose," said Humphrey, "it 's the minister."

"I suppose so," Ford admitted absently. He came to himself to ask, "What 's to be done?"

Humphrey scratched his head. "I d' know as I 'm rightly prepared to say. You don't know nothin' about Friend Boynton's other folks, do ye?"

"No," said Ford.

Another silence followed. "Seems to come kind o' hard right on top of the *other* Providence," mused Humphrey, aloud. "Would it be your judgment to tell 'em?"

"Really, I don't know," said Ford, quite unable to shake off his sterile dismay.

"You don't feel," suggested Humphrey, "as if you 'd like to break the news to 'em?"

"I doubt," answered Ford, glad to be able to lay hold of any idea, "whether Dr. Boynton is in a condition to know even that we 've telegraphed, much less what the answer is."

"Yee," assented Humphrey, "that is so. Then it comes to tellin' Egery. If you was an old friend of the family"—

"I 'm not," said Ford. "I told you that I saw them for the first time in Boston, this spring. Why need you say anything at all?"

"Why," returned Humphrey, with a gleam of hope, "I s'pose, if she asks, we 'll have to."

"She may not ask at once. Don't speak till she does."

"That 's so," mused Humphrey. "It could be done that way. I d' know as anybody could say they was deceived, either."

"Certainly not."

Humphrey put the telegram into a drawer and turned the key upon it. "She can have it when she asks for it," he said doggedly, like a man who has made up his mind to accept the consequences of his transgression.

Ford drew a long breath; a little time had been gained, at any rate. "Can I be of any use over there to-night?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of the infirmary. "Have you watchers?"

"Yee: Laban 's settin' up with him, to-night; and Frances is there with Egery."

"If he asks for me," said Ford, "I should like you to call me at any hour."

He went out, and walked down the dark, silent road to his strange domicile. Hearing him approach, the farmer came across the road, and opened the door for him, and gave him matches to light his lamp. He found his way to his vast chamber; but after he had blown out his light, it was long before he slept.

XVIII.

THE next morning, while Ford sat, after breakfast, at his writing-table, trying to put his mind upon his work, one of the little Shaker boys came to say that Friend Boynton wished to see him. He obeyed the summons with a stricture at the heart. The boy could not say whether Boynton was better or worse, but Ford conceived that he was called in a final moment. He had never seen any one die, and all through his childhood and his earlier youth the thought of death had been agony to him, probably because it was related to fears of the life after death, which survived in his blood after they ceased to be part of his belief. The confirmed health of his adolescence, as well as his accepted theories of existence. had now for years quieted these fears. The sleep and the forgetting which the future had been reasoned so clearly to be could not be terrible to any man of good health, and in the rare moments in which he lifted his

mind from the claims of duty here it reposed tranquilly enough in the logical refuge of nullity provided for it. Annihilation was not dreadful, but the instant preceding it, the last breath of consciousness, in which his personality should be called to cease, to release its strong clutch upon reality, might contain a spiritual anguish, to which an eternity of theologically fancied pangs were nothing. He did not shrink from the consequences of his own mental position; there could be no consequences of belief or disbelief; but he was cold with the thought of confronting the image of his own dissolution in another. Life was not a good, he knew that; but he felt now that it was something, and beyond it there was not even evil. He touched first the swelling muscle of one arm, and then of the other; he laid his hand upon the trunk of a large maple as he passed; he swept the sky with a glance; he smiled to find himself behaving like a man on his way to execution; if he had himself been about to die, he could not have realised more intensely the preciousness of the existence which was slipping into shadow from the grasp of yonder stricken man.

If his face expressed anything of this dark sympathy when he entered the room where

Boynton lay, the sick man did not see it. His doctor was there, seated at the bedside, and Boynton lifted one of the limp hands that lay upon the coverlet and gave it to Ford, saying, with his blandness diluted by physical debility, "You 'll excuse my sending for you, Mr. Ford, but I fancied that you would like to see that I was not in such bad case as I might be."

"You are very good," said Ford, touching his hand, and then taking the chair which the country doctor set for him. The exchange of civilities relieved the tension of his feelings, and he found it no longer possible to regard Boynton with the solemnity with which he had approached him.

"Dr. Wilson and I," Boynton continued, "are treating my case together. By that means we draw the sting of the old proverb about having a fool for one's patient, and we get the benefit of our combined experience. The doctor is inclined to take an optimistic view of my condition, which I don't find myself able to share. I have spent a summer— I may almost say a year— of intense excitements, and I am sure that an obscure affection of the heart with which I was once troubled has made progress." He spoke of it with a courteous lightness and haste, as if

not to annoy his listener, while Ford gazed at him dumbly. "I have been anxious to say that I regretted the expressions — the exasperation—into which I was betrayed on first meeting you, the other morning." Dr. Wilson rose. "Ah! Going, doctor?" asked Boynton. "Don't let me send you away. Mr. Ford and I have no confidences to make each other. I am only offering him the reparation which is due between gentlemen where there has been a misunderstanding."

"Thank you," said Dr. Wilson, "I must go, now. I will see you again to-morrow."

"And in the meantime we will continue the same treatment? Good-morning, doctor. Dr. Wilson," he added, when the latter had withdrawn, "is a man of uncommon qualifications for his profession. I have been much pleased with the manner in which he has taken hold of my case, though we could not agree in all points of our diagnosis." Boynton's voice was feeble, and from time to time he paused from weakness; but he was careful as ever to round his sentences and polish his diction. "As I was saying," he continued, "I used certain expressions for which I wish to apologise."

"There is no occasion for that," Ford began.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but there is!" retorted the other. "My language, even in view of your possible intention of antagonising me, was ridiculous and unjustifiable; for I ought to have been only too glad of the solution of a painful mystery which your presence afforded me. The fact is," he explained, "I met you yesterday after the entire failure of an experiment in psychology which I had been making here under conditions more favourable than I could expect to recur if I should live a thousand years. The experiment was by no means of an advanced character; it was of the simplest character,—the exhibition of a few of the most ordinary phenomena of animal magnetism, in which mere tiros succeed. The failure dumfounded me. At sight of you, my theory of your opposite control, of the necessary antagonism of your sphere, rushed into my mind, and I yielded to an impulse to resent my failure, when I ought, logically, to have hailed your presence as relief, as rescue from an annihilating despair."

"I am very sorry," Ford began again.

"Not at all, not at all!" cried Boynton. "Was I right in supposing that you had spent the previous evening in this vicinity?"

"Mr. Phillips and I had slept at the office —you call it?"

"Is it possible!" Boynton lay quiet for a moment, before he added, musingly, "Yes; that might account for it, *if* my premises were correct. But," he continued sadly, "it is impossible to verify them now. Some one else must take up my work at the very point— You here, and under conditions favourable to the most complete and thorough investigation! This question of antagonisation could be settled in a manner absolutely final; and here I lie, fettered and manacled!" He heaved a passionate sigh, and Ford, in spite of the fact that he knew himself regarded for the moment as a mere instrumentality, an impersonal force, felt a sharp regret for the overthrow of this absurd dreamer.

"Is there—is there any way in which I can be of use to you, Dr. Boynton?" he asked presently.

Boynton did not reply at once. He moved his head uneasily on the pillow, and weakly knotted his fingers together. Then he said, "Yes, there is. I would rather you transacted the business than any of our good friends here, for I am afraid that it might get from them to my daughter.

In fact, I should not know how to communicate with them without alarming her."

He looked beseechingly at Ford, who said, "Well?"

"What are your religious beliefs?"

"I have none," said Ford.

"At your age I had none," rejoined Boynton. Afterward, in circumstances of great sorrow, I embraced the philosophy of spiritualism, because it promised immediate communion and reunion with the wife I had lost. Neither before nor since that time has my theory admitted the necessity of certain —certain—formalities to which the Christian world attaches importance. But the influence of early teachings is very strong, and I cannot resist an inclination— It is entirely illogical, upon either hypothesis, I know! If there is no life hereafter, then it is of no consequence whatever whether any reconciliation takes place. If there is a life hereafter, and it is a mere continuation of this, a progress, a development, under certain new conditions, then the reconciliation can take place there as well as here. This is what my reason tells me, and yet I am not at rest. My dear friend, if you were about to die,"— the hand which Boynton unexpectedly laid upon Ford's sent a thrill to his heart,—

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"and you had parted with some one upon terms of mutual injury, what should you wish?"

"I should wish to see him before I died," answered Ford, gravely.

"And make peace with him,—ask and offer forgiveness. Precisely. There is no doubt an element of superstition in the impulse; it seems childish and unreasonable; and yet I cannot help it. What is it? First, be reconciled to thy brother, . . . agree with thine adversary quickly—I don't remember. My adversary is the father of my child's mother. We quarrelled very bitterly, about this—philosophy of mine. I think he used me harshly; but he is an old man, and doubtless I grieved and thwarted him more than I understood. I don't justify myself. I would like to see him again, and ask him to forgive. I wish you would be so good, Mr. Ford, as to telegraph him—there 's an office at Vardley Station—that I am seriously sick, and would like to see him." Ford could not reply, and Boynton took his silence for reluctance. "I hope I haven't asked too much of you?"

"Oh, no! No. What," he contrived to ask, "is your father-in-law's name?" Boynton gave the name and that of the village in

which he lived, and Ford mechanically took them down in his note-book. He remained with this in his hand, seated beside the bed, and not knowing what to do; but he rose at last, and murmured something about not losing time, when Egeria entered. He would have passed her with a bow, but the cheery voice of Boynton turned him motionless.

"Egeria," he said, as the girl went up to his bedside, "I have been asking a favour of Mr. Ford,—something that I intended for a surprise and pleasure to you. But I think that the surprise might be too much,—might alarm you,—and I had better not let it be a surprise. Don't you think that if your grandfather knew that I was so disposed he would like to make up our little quarrel? Mr. Ford is going to telegraph him to come here! There is no occasion for anxiety"—

Egeria turned upon Ford, with swift self-betrayal. "They telegraphed yesterday. Haven't they heard?" Ford glanced at her father in despair, and bent on her a look of compassion that he was conscious became an appeal for her pity. "Oh, what is it?" she cried, quivering under his imploring scrutiny. "Won't he come? Oh, he is harder than I ever believed! Yes, yes! You were right, father; I will never forgive him!"

"I think I had better tell you the truth," Ford said. "Some one must do it. Your grandfather is dead."

A light of relief, almost of joy, shone in her face. "Oh! I was afraid— I was afraid— Oh, poor grandfather! How could I think it!" She put up her hands to her face, like a child, and wept with sobs that shook the young man's heart.

"When did he die?" she asked at last.

"Two months ago. The telegram was from the minister. He promised to write."

"Do you hear?" cried Egeria. "He would have come, but—he is dead!"

"Oh!" breathed her father, speaking for the first time, "I am very sorry!"

"And now, *now* do you forgive him?" demanded the girl. "Now"—

"Oh, poor soul! I wanted him to forgive *me*," said Boynton. "Well, well! I must wait."

His daughter dropped on her knees beside his bed, and hid her face in the coverlet. "Poor grandfather! Poor grandfather!" she moaned. "How could you think he wouldn't come?" she said, lifting her face. "Do you think now that he was cruel?"

"We quarrelled," answered her father. "I was to blame."

"No, you were not to blame," she retorted, with swift revulsion. "You believed you did right, and you never pretended that you didn't. Oh, if you could only have seen each other again!"

"Yes," answered the sick man; "the wish to see him has been heavy on my soul ever since I came to myself."

The word recalled her, and she looked fondly into her father's face. "Oh, father, have I made you feel badly? I am so sorry for grandfather"—

"No, my poor girl! I can sympathise with your feeling about him; I can understand it." He smoothed her hair with his gentle, weak, small hand. "I can understand, and I can approve of your feeling. But don't be troubled. Your grandfather and I will be friends when we meet. It will make little difference *there* what theories or creeds we hold. They cannot separate us."

"Why, father!" exclaimed the girl, "what do you mean? You are not going to die! The doctor said"—

Boynton smiled in recovering himself. "We are all mortal. Dr. Wilson is very hopeful about me. I am not going to die at once."

He took one of her hands while she bent

over him. "I had mentioned to our good friend here," he said, indicating Ford, "in requesting him to notify your grandfather, my special reasons for wishing to see him, and some little statement — explanation — was necessary in regard to the terms of our separation. I was saying that I wished they had been different. But in the light of this new fact, does my part really appear worse to you than it did before? You can speak freely; I can bear—I ought even to court—the truth."

The girl threw her arms about his neck. "Father! You never had one selfish thought in it. I know that, and I always knew it. I didn't mean to blame you; I only wanted you to excuse him. Oh, nobody needs excusing but me! I stood up before them all, and denied you. I am the one to blame!"

"No, no," protested her father, "you were true to yourself. In the long-run we could have succeeded upon no other conditions. You did right."

"Oh, I did long so to please you! You can't think how hard I tried! But something kept me" — She rose and looked at Ford, the obstruction of whose involuntary presence no effort of his had sufficed to remove, and panted, as if about to make some

appeal to him. But her lips could not shape it; a piteous, formless, low cry broke from them, and she ran from the room, leaving him in a frowning daze.

"I hope, my dear sir," said Boynton, "that you will be able to make allowance for the excitement under which we have been labouring. My daughter's distress on my account, and her affection for her grandfather— But we don't intend to make you the victim of our unhappiness."

"Oh, not at all," said Ford, not knowing what else to say.

"You were very considerate, with regard to me," said Boynton gratefully. "I thank you for your good feeling relative to the telegram. But it is well that I should know the worst at once. In asking your patience for what has just occurred, I am sure that I am only anticipating my daughter's wish. I am by no means as confident as I have been," he added, "that I was correct in my theory of your influence. But you have somehow been strangely involved in our destiny. It is something that I hardly know how to apologise for."

"There is no necessity," said Ford.

"Thanks." The doctor lifted his hand in gratitude, and Ford took it. "Are you

comfortable in your quarters? It was a place that I had sometimes thought, under happier auspices, of devoting to my investigations; but now— My dear sir, I appreciate your kindness, your delicacy, in staying!"

Ford made a murmur of civility, and Sister Frances came in. Then, with a parting pressure of the hand which Boynton had kept in his, he went out. He half dreaded to encounter Egeria again, at the outer threshold; but she was not there.

XIX.

THEY came to those last fervid days to which August often reverts after the shiver that passes over her at the beginning of her second fortnight. The noons were cloudless, and the nights were lit with a moon that hung lightly, like an airy ball, in the sky, whose unfathomable blue the vision must search for the faint stars. The unbroken splendour of these days and nights would be intolerably silent but for the hissing of the grasshoppers in the sun, and the hollow din in which the notes of the crickets sum themselves under the moon. While Ford was busy in the morning he could resist certain influences at work upon him, but at other times he was the prey of a wild restlessness, which he could not charge to his shaken health, for he had begun to grow strong again. He said to himself, as he lay under the sun-smitten pines, or when he walked beneath the maples that broke the glare of the moon on the village street, that

he was waiting here for a man to die, and he tried to quell his restlessness with that cold fact. But he was not able to keep Boynton's danger in his thoughts. There was, indeed, a suspense in Boynton's condition for which neither he nor his fellow physician could account. His mind even grew more vivid under such peril as threatened his body, and in his immunity from pain he was more cheerfully speculative than ever. As the days passed, a curious sort of affectionate confidence grew up between Ford and the fantastic theorist, and the young man listened to his talk with a kindliness which he did not trouble himself to reason. He submitted patiently to the analysis which Boynton made of him and of his metaphysical condition, and heard without a smile certain analogies which he discovered. "Yes," Boynton said, one day, "I find a great similarity of mind and temperament in us. At your age, I thought and felt as you do. There is a fascination, which I can still recognise, in the clean surface which complete negation gives. The refusal of science to believe what it cannot subject to its chemic tests has its sublime side. It is at least absolute devotion to the truth, and it involves martyrdom, like the

devotion to any other religion. For it *is* a religion, and you cannot get away from religion. Whether you say, I believe, or whether you say, I do not believe, still you formulate a creed. The question whether we came from the Clam or the Ancient of Days, whether we shall live for ever, or rot for ever, remains; you cannot put it aside by saying there is no such question. From this vantage-ground of mine—a sick-bed is a vantage-ground—I can see that when I stood where you are I occupied a position not essentially different from that which I assumed afterwards. Light shone on me from one side, and I cast a shadow in this direction; light shone on me from the other side, and I cast a shadow in that direction. My mistake was to fancy at both times that the shadow was I."

Ford evaded the issue as to the identity of their opinions. He admitted that faith in a second life might nerve a man to greater enterprises here; and that one might not so often flag in the pursuit of truth if the horizon did not shut down so close all round. But he said that we had the comfort of knowing that the work of each was delegated to the whole race, and that whoever failed his work could not fail.

"Ah, don't delude yourself!" cried Boynton. "There is *no* comfort in that. What is the race to you or me? You are the race; I am the race; and no one else of all the myriad atoms of humanity could take up our work and keep it the same work."

"You said, just now," said Ford, with a smile, "that you and I were the same."

"I was wrong," promptly admitted Boynton. "We are not the same, and could not be, to all eternity. But if you accept the hypothesis of a second life, in which the objects of this shall remain dear to us, you establish an infrangible, a perpetual continuity of endeavour. The man with whom a great idea has its inception becomes a disembodied spirit. By influx from the spirit world to which he goes, he becomes the partner of the man to whom his work falls here; and that man dying enlarges the partnership in his turn, and so on *ad infinitum*. It must be in this way that civilisation is advanced, that the world-reforms are accomplished."

Boynton's eyes shone, and Ford listened with kindly neutrality. On some sides he was compelled to respect Boynton's extraordinary alertness. In many things he was grotesquely ignorant; he was a man of very

small literature, and he had the limitations of a country-bred person in his conceptions of the world; but his mind, in the speculations on which it habitually dwelt, had a vast and bold sweep, and his theories sprang up fully formed, under his breath, like those plants which the Japanese conjuror fans to flower in the moment after he has put the seed in the ground.

He tossed his head upon the pillow impatiently. "When I think of those things," he said, "I can hardly wait for the slow process of decay to unfold the truth to me. Perhaps I approached the unseen world with too arrogant a confidence," he continued. "At any rate, I have been found unworthy, and my progress on earth has been arrested for ever."

Ford could not withhold the expression of the senseless self-accusal in his heart. "I should be very sorry," he said, "if I had been the means of crossing your purposes."

"You never were wilfully so," said Boynton. "Besides, as I told you, I have begun to have my misgivings as to my theory of you. I suspect that I may have exaggerated my daughter's powers; that they were of a limited nature, terminable by the lapse of time. What do you think," he asked, after

a silence, as if willing to break away from these thoughts, "of our Shaker friends? Does their life strike you as the solution of the great difficulty?"

"No," said Ford; "it strikes me as begging the question."

"Yes, so it is," assented Boynton; "so it is, in some views. It is a life for women rather than men."

An indefinable pang seized Ford. "I don't quite understand you. Do you think it is a happy life for a woman?"

"There is *no* happy life for a woman—except as she is happy in suffering for those she loves, and in sacrificing herself to their pleasure, their pride and ambition. The advantage that the world offers her—and it does not always offer that—is her choice in self-sacrifice; the Shakers prescribe it for her."

Ford said nothing for a time, while the pain still rankled. Then he asked, "Don't you think the possible power of choosing is a great advantage? I don't know that as a man I expect to be happy; but I like to make my ventures in unhappiness. It saves me from the folly of accusing fate. If I surrendered myself to Shakerism, I should feel myself a prisoner; I should not run the

risk of wounds, but I should have no chance of escape."

"A woman doesn't like to fight," replied Boynton. "Besides, there are no irrevocable vows in Shakerism. When you do not like it you leave it. It is no bad fate for a woman. For most women it would be a beneficent fate."

An image of Egeria in the Shaker garb, with her soft young throat hidden to the chin, and the tight gauze cap imprisoning her beautiful hair, rose in the young man's thought, and would not pass at his willing. It was with something like the relief of waking from an odious dream that he saw the girl enter the room in her usual dress. He involuntarily rose.

She had a spray of sumac in her hand, and she put it lightly beside her father on the bed. The leaves were already deeply tinged with crimson. "Ah, yes," he said, taking it up and holding it before him, "I am glad you found it. I thought I saw it the last time I walked that way; but it was only partly red, then. I had intended to get it for you. After my daughter was sick here, this spring," he added, turning his eyes upon Ford, "she showed a singular predilection during her convalescence for wild-flowers.

They wouldn't come fast enough for her; all the family were set to looking for them. Do you remember, Egeria, the day when we got you out under the apple-blossoms? What is the apple-tree like now? Some yellow leaves on it, here and there?"

"Yes, but the red apples burn like live coals among them," said Egeria.

"Fruition, fruition," murmured her father dreamily. "Not so sweet as hope. But autumn was always my favourite season,—my favourite season. I suppose the long grass is limp and the clover-heads are black in the alleys of the orchard. All those aspects of nature— The sumac is first to feel the fall. Have you seen any other red leaves, Egeria?"

"I saw a young maple in the swamp that was almost as red in places as this," said Egeria. "But they were too high to reach."

"Ah," returned her father, "they will soon be red enough everywhere."

"Couldn't Miss Boynton tell me where her maple is?" Ford interposed. "I could get you the leaves."

"Oh, no,—no," began the doctor.

"I do a certain amount of walking every day. If Miss Boynton will tell me where the maple is, and begin with the swamp"—

"The swamp," said Egeria, "is just back of the south pasture; but I should have to look for the tree myself."

"Take me with you then," said the young man, with what he thought a great boldness.

"I could do that," returned Egeria, simply. "If Frances were here, I could go with you now. It isn't far."

"I don't need any one, now, my dear," said her father. "You can put the bell here by my pillow, and I can ring."

"Well," said Egeria to Ford. "We will stop at the office, and tell them, father," she added. Frances promised to listen for the bell, and stood at the office-door watching them as they walked away together.

"I think you can easily bend the tree," Egeria said. "It 's very slim, and I thought at first I could bend it myself. I should hate to have you break it."

"I will try not to break it," answered Ford.

They crossed the meadow in desultory talk, but before they reached the edge of the swamp she abruptly halted him, and said with a sort of fearful resolution, "Did you know that my father was here when you came?" She searched his face with a

piercing intensity of gaze, her lips apart with eagerness and her breathing fluttered.

"No," said Ford, "my coming here was purely accidental." Her eyes studied his a moment longer: then she dropped them, and hurried on again as abruptly as she had stopped. "But I always hoped I might see you again," he continued, "and tell you—I went to tell your father in Boston—that I never dreamt it was you I hurt there, that night. I wanted to tell him that nothing in the world— But we quarrelled"—

"I know, I know," interrupted the girl. "There is the tree," she said, hastily, pointing out a young maple with reddened boughs, that stood some yards beyond the wall. "Do you think you can get to it? Do you think you can bend it down?"

Every nerve in him thrilled with the wrench of leaving half said what had been so long in his heart; but he must obey her will. "I think so," he replied, and he got over the wall. He stepped from one quaking bed of mossy decay to another, till he reached the tree. He caught it about the slender stem well up towards the limbs, and, bending it over, began to break them away and fling them on the ground.

"Oh, no!" cried Egeria from where she stood. "Don't!"

"Don't what?" asked Ford, turning half round, without releasing the tree.

"You seemed to tear it so. You have enough. That branch at the top" —

"Shall I break it off?"

"No—no. Let it stay."

"Would you like it?"

"Yes."

Ford took out his knife, and slitted the branch from the tree with a downward stroke, and drove the blade into the thick of the hand with which he held the tree. He gathered up the branches, and putting them into the wounded hand gripped it with the other, and returned to Egeria.

She started at sight of the blood. "I made you cut yourself."

"I don't see how that is," answered Ford. "But I cut myself." He stood holding his hand, while the blood dropped to the ground.

"I will tie it up for you," said Egeria, quelling a shudder. "You ought to have something wet next to it. That will keep it from inflaming."

"Yes?" said Ford.

She made search for her handkerchief, and drew forth the stout square of linen which

the kindness of the community had provided for her. She shook out its tough expanse. "That is a Shaker handkerchief," she said.

"It looks rather grandiose for the purpose," Ford remarked. "If you will take mine"— He touched as nearly as he could the breast pocket of his coat with his elbow. She soberly obeyed his gesture, and pulled it out. "Can you tear it?"

"I needn't tear it," she answered, folding it into a narrow strip. "I can wet this end in the water, here, and wrap the rest round it."

She stooped to a little pool near the wall, and dipped the handkerchief into it; then she laid the wet corner over the cut, which he had washed in the same pool, and folded the dry part firmly around it. Her fingertips, soft and warm, left the sensation of their touch upon his hand.

They walked rapidly away. "Better hold it up," she said, seeing that he let his arm hang at his side.

"Oh," he answered stupidly, and obeyed for a moment, and then dropped his hand again.

"You 're forgetting," she said.

"Yes, I was," replied Ford, recollecting himself. "I was thinking that it must have

seemed as if some savage beast had torn you."

He looked at the hand on which she wore her ring, and she hid the hand in the folds of her dress, and turned her head away. Then she glanced at him, as if about to answer, but she only said, "When you get home, you must wet the cloth again."

"Thanks," said Ford; "it will have to look after itself when it stops stinging."

She looked troubled. "Does it hurt you very badly?"

"I suppose it's going through the usual formalities."

"You had better show it to father—Oh!" she cried, blushing, "I have forgotten the leaves for him." She almost ran in retracing her steps.

Ford pursued her. "Miss Boynton, let me go and get them."

"No, no, I can get them. You mustn't come. I don't wish you to come." She looked over her shoulder, and saw him standing irresolute. "Don't wait for me; I can take them home."

He lingered a moment, looking after her, and then turned and walked away. He did not go back to the infirmary, but kept on towards his own house, and arrived with a

vague smile on his lips, which had shaped them ever since he left her. He scarcely realised then that she had been quick to avail herself of a chance to be alone with him, and that when once with him she had been willing to delay their parting. A jarring sensation of alternate abandon and reserve was what finally remained of the interview in his nerves.

XX.

IN the morning, when he walked up into the village, he found her coming out of the office gate. She faltered at sight of him, and glanced anxiously toward him. He had meant to stop at the office, but now he had a senseless impulse to keep on his way. He hesitated, and then crossed to where she stood. She had a small basket in her hand, and she said that Elder Joseph had given her leave to look over his vines, and see if there were any grapes ripe enough yet for her father to eat. There was an indefinable intention in her manner to detain him, which he felt as inarticulately, and there was something more intangible still,—something between fearful question and utter trust of him; something that chiefly intimated itself in the appeal with which her eyes rested on his when she first looked up. He dropped his own eyes before the gaze which he knew to be unconscious on her part, and she said suddenly, as if recollecting herself, "Oh!

will you show your hand to father? How is it?"

"That 's all right," answered Ford, putting it into his pocket. She began to walk towards the garden, and he walked with her. "It isn't my work hand."

"Work?" she asked.

"I keep up my scribbling. I write for the papers," he explained further, at a glance of inquiry from her.

"Some of the brothers and sisters write, too," she said. "The Shakers have a paper."

"Yes, I have seen it," said Ford. "They write for pleasure and from duty. I am sorry to say that my work is mostly for the pay it brings. I 'm hoping to do something in another way by-and-by. In the meantime I write and sell my work. It 's what they call pot-boiling."

"I didn't know they *paid* for writing!"

"They do,—a little. You can starve very decently on it."

"Father used to write for the paper at home, but they never paid him anything. He is slow getting well," she added, with a sad inconsequence, "and I suppose he will never be quite so strong again. But it must be a good sign when he has these cravings. It seems as if he couldn't wait till the grapes

are ripe; the doctor says he can have all the fruit he wants. Have you ever been in this garden before?" she asked, as they entered the bounds of Brother Joseph's peculiar province.

"No," replied Ford, looking round him with a pleasure for which he could not account. "But I feel as if I might have been here always."

"Yes. I suppose it looks like everybody's garden. It's like our garden at home." He glanced about it with her, as they stood in the planked path together. At one side of the beds of pot-herbs, and apart from the ranks of sweet-corn, the melons, the beans, the faded peas, and the long rows of beets and carrots, was a space allotted to flowers, the simple annuals that have long been driven from our prim parterres. "Our garden ran back of the house down to the river; but it was all neglected and run wild. There was a summer-house on the edge of the terrace, and the floor was rotten; the trellises for the grapes were slanting every which way."

She seemed to be recalling these aspects in a fond reverie, rather than addressing him; but they gave him a vivid sense of her past. He saw her in this old garden by the river-side, before any blight had fallen

upon her life. He imagined her a very happy young girl, there; not romantic, but simple and good, and even gay. "I know that sort of a garden," he said.

"Yes," she continued, looking dreamily at Brother Joseph's flower-beds, "here is prince's feather, and coxcomb, that I hated to touch when I was little, because it seemed like flesh and blood. And here is bachelor's button, and mourning bride, and marigolds, and touch-me-not."

"I had forgotten them," said Ford. "I suppose I used to see them when I was a boy. But it 's a long time since I was in the country."

"You must be glad to get back."

"No," replied Ford. "I can't honestly say that I am. I wanted to get away from it too badly for that. The country is for the pleasure of people born in town."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nothing very definite. When I began to grow up, I found the country in my way. I daresay I should have been uncomfortable anywhere. I was very uncomfortable in the country."

"I have never been much in the city," she said. "But I didn't like it."

He remembered that he had helped to

make the city hateful to her, though she seemed to have forgotten it, and he said, in evasion of this recollection, "It 's different with a man. I had my way to make, and the city was my chance."

"And didn't you ever feel homesick?" she asked.

"I used to dream about the place after I came away. I used to dream that I had gone back there to live. That was my nightmare. It always woke me up."

"And did you never go back?"

"No. I have never looked on those hills since I left them, and I never will if I can help it. I suppose it 's a matter of association," he continued. "My associations of not getting on are with the country; my associations of getting on in some sort are with the city. That is enough to account for my hating the one and liking the other."

"Yes," said Egeria, "that is true." She added after a moment, "Have they ever told you what Joseph's associations with this region are?"

"No. I should like to know."

"He saw it in a dream, years before he came here. When he first visited the Vardley Shakers he recognised it, and took it for a sign that he was to stay."

"That was remarkable," said Ford. Egeria was silent. "Do you believe in such things, Miss Boynton?" he asked.

She turned away as if she had not heard him, and began to search the vines for ripe grapes. She went down one side of the long trellis, and he followed down the other. Between the leaves and twisting stems he caught glimpses of her yellow hair and her blue eyes.

"Do you find any?" she asked.

"Any what?"

"Grapes."

"I hadn't looked."

She sighed. "It 's about as well. There don't seem to be any." After a while she stopped, and he saw her glance at him through the leaves. "I don't know whether I believe in those things or not. Do you?"

"No."

"The Shakers do. They all think they have had some sign. But I shouldn't like to know things beforehand. It wouldn't help you to bear the bad. Besides, it doesn't seem to leave you free, somehow. I think the great thing is to be free."

"It 's the first thing."

"Yes; that is what I always felt. It was slavery, even if it was true." He knew

what she meant; but he said nothing, though she waited for him to speak. "It was what I tried to say sometimes; but I couldn't express it. And I couldn't have made him understand." With that screen of vines between them, and each other's faces imperfectly seen through the leaves and tendrils, it was easier to be frank. "It cut us off from everybody in the world. It was what made the quarrel with grandfather."

She waited again, and now Ford said, "Yes, your father said it was that."

"It made everybody suspect us. I didn't care so much for myself after I got away from home, where they didn't know us; but I cared for father. He suffered so from the things he had to bear. You can't think what they were."

"I'm ashamed to think what some of them were," said Ford.

She paused a moment. "You mean what you said to him in Boston?"

"Yes."

"Yes, that hurt him," she said, simply. "He had been very proud of the interest you took the first time you came. He said you were the only man of science that had taken any notice of him. Afterwards—he couldn't make it out."

"I don't wonder!" cried Ford. "It was incredible. But I never came to threaten him."

"He was more puzzled when you wouldn't meet him in that public séance. Why wouldn't you?"

"Why?" demanded Ford, in dismay.

"Yes, why?"

"I don't know that I can say."

"But you had some reason. Was it because you thought you would fail?"

Ford did not answer directly. "Can you believe that I wanted to consider him in the matter?" he asked, in turn.

"Yes, that is what I did believe." She drew a long breath, and hid herself wholly behind a thick mass of the vine. "Did you did you get a letter from me?"

"Yes," said Ford.

"I thought that I ought to write it; I didn't know whether to do it. But I couldn't help it. I was glad you refused."

"I was glad you wrote the letter. It wasn't always a comfort to me, though. I had no right to any thanks from you. I felt as if I had extorted it."

"Extorted it!" she repeated, with the same eager persistence with which she had pressed him for his reason in refusing to

meet her father. "Do you mean—do you mean that you tried to make me write the letter?"

"How could I try to make you write me a letter?" demanded the young man, stupefied.

"I don't know. I was not sure that I understood. I can't tell you—now. Did you destroy it?"

"Destroy what?"

"The letter."

"No: I kept it."

"Oh—will you give it back to me?"

"Certainly." Ford unfolded a pocket-book, and took out a worn-looking scrap of paper, which he passed through an open space in the trellis. Her hand appeared at the aperture and received it. A hesitation made itself felt through the vines. "Will you give it back to *me*, Miss Boynton?"

"There 's nothing to be ashamed of in it," she said, and her hand reappeared at the open space with the letter.

"Thanks," said Ford.

"They will think I am a long time looking for a few grapes," said Egeria.

"They 've no idea how few there are, and how long it takes to find them," answered Ford.

She laughed. "Are they scarce on your side, too?"

"There are no ripe bunches at all. Shall I pick single ones?"

"Oh, yes; any that you can get. It's rather early for them yet."

"Is it? I thought it was about the right time."

"That shows you haven't lived in the country for a good while. You've forgotten."

"Yes," assented Ford. "I haven't seen grapes on the vines for ten years."

"Haven't you been out of the city in that time?"

"Not if I could help it."

"And why can't you help it now?"

"They told me I wasn't well, and I'd better go to the mountains." He sketched in a few words his course in coming to Vardley.

"I thought you looked pale, when you first came," she said. After a little while she added, "You can bear it if you're getting better, I suppose."

He laughed. "Oh, it isn't so disagreeable here. I'm interested in your Shaker friends."

"They think they are living the true life," said the girl.

"Do you?" asked Ford.

"They are very good; but I have seen good people in the world outside," she answered. "I think they are the kind that would be good anywhere. I shouldn't like having things in common with others. I should like a house of my own. And I should like a world of my own."

"Yes," said Ford, laughing. "I should like the private house, too. But I don't think I could manage a whole world."

"I mean a world that is for the people that live in it. When they die, they have their own world, and they oughtn't to try to come back into ours."

"Oh, decidedly, I agree with you there!" cried the young man.

She seemed not to like his light tone. "I know that I don't express it well."

"It couldn't be expressed better."

"I meant that I hoped any friend of mine would be too well off to be willing to come back."

"Yes."

They found themselves at the end of the trellis, and face to face. He dropped his grapes into the basket, where some loose berries rolled about. She looked ruefully at the result of their joint labours.

"Well!" she said, and they walked out of the garden together.

At the gate Ford took out his watch, and stopped with a guilty abruptness. "Miss Boynton, I am going away,—I am going to Boston, this afternoon. I"—

"Going away?"

"Yes, I have business in Boston. Can I do anything for your father or—for you—there?"

"No," she said, looking at him in bewilderment. "Will you come and say good-bye to him? Or perhaps you had better not," she faltered.

"I'm coming back this evening!" he cried in astonishment. "Will you lend me this basket?" he asked.

"Why, yes. It belongs to Rebecca."

"Don't tell her I borrowed it. I must go now. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye." She stood looking after him till a turn of the road to Vardley Village hid him.

When he reached Boston he found that the year had turned from summer to autumn with a distinctness which he had not noted in the country. The streets, where his nerves expected the fierce heat in which he had left them, were swept by cool inland

airs. The crowds upon the pavement had perceptibly increased; a tide of women, fresh from their sojourn at the sea-side and in the country, was pouring down Winter Street, reanimated for shopping, and with their thoughts set upon ribbons with a vividness that shone in their faces. The third week of the fall season was placarded at the museum; and in the Public Garden, which he crossed upon an errand to his lodging, there was a blaze of autumnal flowers in place of the summer bloom which he had left. He met here and there groups of public-school children loitering homeward with their books. The great, toiling majority who never go out of town were there, of course; the many whose vacations and purses are short had all returned; it would be some weeks yet before the few who can indulge the luxury of the coloured leaves and the peculiar charm of still September days out of town would come home. It was the moment in which Ford had ordinarily the most content in his city. He liked to renew his tacit companionship with all these returning exiles; the promise of winter snugness brought him almost a domestic joy; the keen sparkle of the early-lighted gas in the street lamps and the shop-windows

was a pleasure as distinct as it was inarticulate. But now he felt estranged amid the cheerful spectacle of the September afternoon. The country quiet, which he used to hate, tenderly appealed to him; the quaint life of the Shaker village, of which he had, without knowing it, become a part, reclaimed him; the cry of a jay that strutted down an overhanging branch to defy him as he walked along the road, after parting with Egeria, was still in his ears; his vision was full of the sunny glisten of meadows where the Shakers' hired men were cutting the rowan, and of roadsides fringed with golden-rod and asters. He was impatient till he could be off again, and he made haste back to the fruiterer's where he had left his basket with an order to fill it with grapes. He was vexed to find it standing empty in a corner.

"You didn't say what kind you wanted," explained the fruiterer.

"Put in what you like,—the best kind," said Ford. "You can judge; they 're for a sick person."

"All right." The man filled the basket, and Ford went to another counter and took up a bouquet, which he added to his purchase.

He bought two or three newspapers in

the cars, and read them on the way back, throwing those he was not reading over the flowers on the seat beside him, so as to hide them.

He got out of the train at Vardley Station with the sense of having committed a public action. He was rescued from this embarrassment, and curiously restored to his self-possession at sight of Egeria, who came driving the old Shaker horse over from the post-office, as the train halted. He was not alarmed to see her, but he asked formally, "Nothing the matter, I hope, Miss Boynton?"

"Oh, no. I came to get the letters; and I thought I would wait for you, if you were on this train."

"Thanks," said Ford, putting the basket into the open buggy, and mounting to a place beside her. She looked down at it, but said nothing. He took the reins from her, and drove out of the village before he spoke again. "I have got some grapes for your father."

She laughed, and lifted the basket at once into her lap. "I *thought* you were going for something," she said, "after you were gone; and I guessed with Sister Frances. I guessed it was grapes, and she guessed it

was peaches. You thought he would be disappointed at Elder Joseph's vines." She raised the lid of the basket, and after a glance pushed it to again with a quick gesture, and looked gravely at him. "That is too much," she said.

"I hope you don't think so!" he pleaded. "I counted on your being pleased."

"So I am pleased," she returned. She opened the basket again, and looked within.

"You must have hated to come back to the country," she said, after a silence, "if you like the city so much."

"No. For once I was willing to come back. If the country hadn't threatened to keep me, I shouldn't have hated it. I never hated the country about here. What have you been doing this afternoon? It seems a great while."

"Does it? Yes, it does! I suppose there 's such a sameness here that anything that breaks it up makes the time longer. Sister Frances says that it 's so when any of them are gone. After you went I came in and stayed with father. He didn't know that I had been trying to get him some grapes. Your going away seemed to fret him, and that made me a little anxious to—to—see if you *had* come."

"I never thought of not coming back."

"Yes, I know. Silas went down to the post-office with me: but Humphrey came along in his buggy, and Silas went back with him. He couldn't wait for you, and I said I would."

"Thanks. But you took too much trouble. I expected to walk up from the station."

"I didn't believe you 'd want to carry the basket."

"Yes, I should. But what would you have done if you had had to drive home alone in the dusk?"

"Oh, I knew you would be there."

The lamps were lit in the office, and the window was red with cheerful light where the doctor lay in the infirmary, when they drew up before the gate, and Ford helped Egeria down. Then he took the paper in which the bouquet was wrapped, and handed it to her. "There are a few flowers, too."

"I *thought it* must be flowers," she said. "I 'll put them round the grapes."

"The flowers are for you," said Ford, with dogged resolution.

Laban came across the street from the office, and took the horse by the bridle. "The sisters want you should take your tea at the office, to-night. They 've got it ready

for you, and they 've sent word to Friend Williams not to be expectin' you."

While Ford waited a few moments in the office parlour, Egeria came, and he heard her talking with Rebecca and Diantha in the sitting-room. When the latter came to tell him that tea was ready, he perceived that his gift was already a matter of family approval. He sat down at the table, and Egeria came out of the kitchen adjoining with the polished tin tea-pot in her hand. Then he saw that the table was set for two. Her face was flushed, as if she had been near the heat; but she sat down quietly, saying, "He was asleep, and Frances was with him. I must run back in a minute, for I want him to have them as soon as he wakes." He knew that she meant the grapes. When she was handing him his cup, she half drew it back. "I didn't ask you whether you like cream and sugar both, and I 've put them in."

"I like it so," said Ford.

She ate with more appetite than he, and was gayer than he had seen her before. A happy light was in her eyes, and when they met his this light seemed to suffuse her face. She talked, and he listened dreamily. It was very strange to a man of his solitary life. He did not remember to have seen any

one pour tea. At the boarding-house they came and asked if you would have tea or coffee, and brought it to you in a cup; at the restaurant they set it before you in a pot, and you helped yourself, or the waiter reached over your shoulder and poured it out. Ford looked round the sincerely bare dining-room; the windows were shut to keep out the evening chill, and the curtains were snugly drawn. The door to the kitchen was open, and he could hear Diantha moving about there; now and then she made a little rattling at the stove; once she came in with a plate of rice-cakes, and offered to wait upon them; but Egeria passed the plate to Ford herself, and then gave him the butter and syrup. He tried to make her one with the frightened and joyless creature whom he had first seen in Boston; then he perceived that she had fallen silent under his silent scrutiny.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "is anything the matter?"

"Oh, no!" she answered. "But I must go back to father. Will you come over and see him?"

"Yes."

He walked across the road with her under the stars, keen as points of steel in the

moonless sky; but at the gate he said, "No, I won't go in to-night. I will come to see your father to-morrow."

She said "Well," as if she understood that he wished to delay being thanked.

As he lingered, she faltered too, and they stood confronted without speaking. Then he said, "Good-night," and made an offer of offering his hand. She saw it, and stretched hers towards him; but by this time he had let his hand fall, thinking it unnoticed. The manœuvre was reciprocally repeated; by a common impulse they both broke into a low nervous laugh, and their hands met in a quick clasp.

"Thank you for the flowers," she said, when he had got a few paces away.

A little further off, he glanced back. She seemed to be standing yet at the door; but the light was uncertain, and it might have been a shadow. He delayed a little, and then went back; but she was now gone, and he saw her head reflected against the curtain within.

XXI.

FORD expected that they would meet next in the mood of their parting; but she received him with a sort of defensive scrutiny that puzzled him and estranged her from him. He fancied that she avoided being alone with him, and made haste to shelter herself from him in her father's presence, where she sat and knitted while they talked. If he glanced at her, he found her eye leaving him with a look of anxious quest. He went away feeling that she was capricious. Other days followed when she was different, and met him with eager welcome; but then he did not think her capricious, and he forgot from time to time the inquisition that vexed him and that seemed to weary and distress her.

He commonly wrote in the morning and came in the afternoon. She sat on the threshold of the infirmary, and if her father was awake she invited him in-doors; if her father was asleep, she drew Ford off a little way into the orchard. There had been a change in Boynton. He never spoke hopefully of

his condition to Ford; but although he still showed a great feebleness, there were often days when he left his bed and sat up in a rocking-chair to receive his visitor. He did not remain long afoot, and he never showed any wish to go out-of-doors. Sometimes Egeria and Frances, in their zeal for his convalescence, urged him in the mild fall weather to go out for the air; but after a glance at the landscape he said, "Yes, yes, to-morrow, if it 's fair. I 'm hardly equal to it to-day." When Ford was not with him, or some of the more metaphysical of the Shakers, he read or mused in his chair. At first he had wished to talk of the questions that perplexed him with Egeria, but she had fondly evaded them; later, when she showed herself willing to afford him this resource, he had no longer the wish for it, and did not respond to her promptings.

His mind must have been dwelling upon this change in himself and her, one afternoon, when Ford came in and sat down with him. "You see," he said, "how they have tricked out my room for me?" and he indicated the boughs of coloured leaves, varied with bunches of wild asters and tops of golden-rod, in which the Shakers had carried him the autumn. "There isn't healing in

my leaves, as there was in the flowers which they brought Egeria this spring," he added, with a slight sigh, "but there is sympathy —sympathy." Ford left him to the pleasure he evidently found in the analogy and contrast, and Boynton presently resumed: "There is an experiment which I should have liked to try, if she had continued the same. I should have liked to see if we could not change places, and she exert upon me that influence which I once had over her. There is no telling how sanative it might be in a case like mine, in which there is a certain obscurity of origin and character. But I am convinced that it would be useless to attempt the experiment. I see now that the psychic force must have left her entirely during her sickness. Not a trace of it remains. The fact is a very interesting one, which I should hope to investigate with important results, if I could live to do so. It may be that we approach the other world only through some abnormal condition here. You have observed this remarkable change in my daughter?"

"You know I only saw Miss Boynton two or three times before I came here," said Ford. "She seems very much better."

"That *is* the change. Her power has

escaped in this return to health. I saw it,—I almost noted its flight. Day by day, after the crisis of her fever, when convalescence began, I perceived that she grew more and more rebellious to my influence, without knowing it. If I had obeyed my intuitions, I should never have put her powers to the final test. I see now that you had nothing to do with our failure here, whatever the effect of your sphere was in Boston. Her gift, rare and wonderful as it was, was the perishable efflorescence of a nervous morbidity. I might have known this before,—perhaps I *did* know it, and refused to accept it as a fact. It was hard, it was impossible, to relinquish my belief in her continued powers just when I had brought them to the most favourable conditions for their exercise. But I don't give up my belief in what has been. I know that she once possessed the power that has been withdrawn, if ever it existed on earth. You will get out of the matter very easily by saying that it never did exist," added Boynton bitterly. "*I* should once have said so; but now I say, whoever keeps it or loses it, this power has never ceased to exist. Has my daughter ever spoken to you of this matter?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes," said Ford.

"It would be intolerable if she knew how great her loss was. But she never realised the preciousness of her gift while she possessed it."

The colour of superiority, of censure, which tinged these words irritated the young man. "As far as I could understand, she seemed to dislike ghosts."

"Yes, I know that. I had that to contend with in her."

"It seemed to me that she had a terror of them, and that your researches had cost her"— Ford stopped.

"What?" asked Boynton.

"She has never complained," answered the other. "I could only conjecture"—

"Oh, I can believe that she never complained!" cried Boynton; and now he lay a long space silent. At last, "Yes," he groaned, with an indescribable intensity of contrition in his tone, "I see what you mean! I seized upon a simple, loving nature, good and sweet in its earthliness, and sacred in it, and alienated it from all its possible happiness to the uses of my ambition. I have played the vampire!"

Ford rose in alarm at the effect of his words, and essayed what reparation he could. "No,"

he protested. "The harm is less than you think. I don't believe that any one but ourselves can do us essential injury here. We may make others unhappy, but we can't destroy the possibility of happiness in them; we can only do that in ourselves. Your conscience has to do with your motives; it judges you by them, and God—if we suppose Him—will not judge you by anything else. The effect of misguided actions belongs to the great mass of impersonal evil."

It was the second time that he had presumed to distinguish between Boynton and Egeria, and he had again committed a cruel impertinence. He continued with a sort of remorseful rage to launch upon Boynton such fragments of consolation as came into his head; and he hurried from him without knowing that his phrases about impersonal evil had already floated that buoyant spirit beyond the regrets in which he had plunged it.

Still heated and ashamed, he issued from the infirmary, and, as if it were strange that she should be there, he started at sight of Egeria under one of the orchard trees. But in that fascination which makes us hover about the victim of some wrong or the witness of some folly of ours, he pressed towards

her. She was leaning against the trunk of the tree, with some knitting in her hand, and he flung himself on the grass at her feet. He thought that he meant to confess to her what had just passed, but he made no attempt to do so. "Are you so very tired?" she asked, smiling down at him.

"Not very," he answered, "but I know no reason why I shouldn't sit down,—except one."

"What 's that?"

"That you 're standing."

It was pretty, and she was a girl, and she softly laughed as she began to knit. "That 's work in real earnest," he said, looking at the substantial grey sock mounted on her needles.

"Yes; the Shakers sell them," she explained. "I suppose you have got through your work for the day."

"I 've got through my writing, if you call that work. It 's so dull it can't be play." Again he thought he would speak of what had passed between him and her father, but he did not.

"Do you write stories?" she asked, with her eyes on her knitting.

"Oh, not so bad as that! I do what they call social topics,—perhaps because I never go into society; and I do them with difficulty,

as I deserve, for I 'm only making literature a means. I understand that if you want to be treated well by it you must make it an end, and be very serious and respectful with it."

"Oh, yes," said the girl, as if she did not understand.

"I 'm serious enough," he continued, "but I don't respect my writing as it goes on. It 's as good as most; but it ought to be as good as the least."

"What are social topics?" she asked presently.

"I suppose I 'm treating a social topic now. I 'm writing about some traits of New England country life. I began it—do you care to hear?"

"Yes, I should like to hear about it if you will tell me."

"It 's nothing. I was telling you the other day of our start from Boston. I couldn't help noticing some things on the way; my ten years in town had made me a sort of foreigner in the country, and I noticed the people and their way of living; and after I got here I sent a letter to a newspaper about it. You might think that would end it; but you don't know the economies of a hack-writer. I 've taken my

letter for a text, and I 'm working it over into an article for a magazine. If I were a real literary man I should turn it into a lecture afterwards, and then expand it into a little book." Egeria knitted on in silence, as if her mind were away, or had not strength to deal with these abstractions. "Who is that?" asked Ford, as a young Shakeress with a gentle face looked out of a window of the nearest family house, and nodded in pleasant salutation to Egeria.

"That is the school-teacher."

"They all look alike to me,—the sisters. I don't see how you tell them apart, so far off."

"Yes, they all have the same expression, —the Shaker look. But they 're very different."

"Why, of course. And the Shaker look is a very good look. It 's peaceful. I suppose they have their bickerings, though."

"Not often. They 're what they seem. That 's their great ambition."

"It 's an immense comfort. You must be quite at home among them."

"Yes," said the girl.

"Do you mean no?"

"They do everything they can to make me; but they have their own world, and I

don't belong to it. They feel that as well as I do; but they can't help it."

"Of course not. That's the nature of worlds, big and little. You can't be at home *near* them; you have to be *in* them to be comfortable. I have a world in my own neighbourhood that I don't belong to. I like to abuse it; but it's quite as good a neighbour as I deserve, and it would be civil if I made an effort to fit into it. But I suppose I was a sort of born outcast."

"Does Mr. Phillips write, too?" asked the girl.

The abruptness of the transition was a little bewildering; but Ford answered, "My Phillips?. No; he talks."

"But hasn't he any business?"

"None of his own. Did he amuse you?"

"I don't think I understood him," said Egeria.

"He would be charmed with your further acquaintance. He would tell you that he could meet you on common ground,—that he didn't understand himself."

She left Phillips by another zigzag. "I suppose," said she, "you like the influence that a writer has. It must be a pleasure to feel your power over people."

"No," said Ford, "I don't care anything

about the influence. It shocks me to think of people being turned this way or that by my stuff."

"Then you believe," she said, with that recurrent intensity, "that we can have power over others without knowing it, and even without wishing it?"

"Oh," he answered carelessly, "we all control one another in the absurdest way."

"Yes." She turned quite pale, and looked away, passing her hand over her forehead as if she were giddy. Then she rose quickly, and hurried down the path to the infirmary. The young man followed.

"Did you think you heard your father's bell?"

"I 'd better see if he rang." She went into the little house, but came out directly. "No; he 's trying to sleep."

"Then we must go back, so as not to disturb him."

"Yes," she said, but with an accent of interrogation and reluctance. "I don't believe I ought to leave him."

"We shall be near enough," he rejoined with a kind of wilfulness. "Here comes Sister Frances; she will stay with him."

"I might speak to her," murmured Egeria, hesitating, as Frances came across the road.

"It isn't worth while. She will find him alone, and will naturally stay till you come in." Ford glanced about him. "Which is the apple-tree they call yours?"

"The one they brought me out under the first day I was well enough?"

"Yes; I have heard a great deal of that tree. It is famous in the community annals."

"Oh, it doesn't look the least now as it did then." She led the way far up the orchard slope. But when they came to the tree, and she said, putting her hand on the trunk, "This is it," neither of them spoke of it. She glanced at the hill on the brow of which some chestnut-trees stood.

"We could get a better view from that place," he suggested.

"Do you think so?" She climbed half up the wall that divided the orchard from a meagre pasture above, and looked back. He passed her and helped her over the wall. "I forgot that this meadow was so wet," she said, hesitating near the wall.

"But nature never does things by halves." said Ford. "Where she makes a sopping meadow, she puts plenty of stones to step on; and where you are doubtful of your footing, she puts me to lend you a helping

hand." He extended his hand to her as he spoke, and drew her lightly to the sloping boulder on which he stood, and on which she must cling to him for support.

"Oh, I could get on well enough alone," she said, laughing nervously.

"You can get on better with help."

"Yes."

She followed him, springing from stone to stone, staying herself now by his hand and now by his arm, till they reached the hard, dry top, where the tangled low blackberry vines overran the boulder heads thickly crusted with lichens.

"I didn't suppose it was so bad," she said, shaking out her skirts.

"I don't think it so very bad," he returned. "It wasn't a great way across."

"No. There are some chestnuts. It must be too soon for them."

"Let us see," said Ford. He advanced leisurely, and with a club knocked off some burs. Returning with them to the rock, where she had stood watching him, he hammered the nuts from their cells. They were scarcely in the milk yet. "These trees are too old," he said. "The nuts ripen first on the young trees that stand apart in the meadows. There are some in the rye-field

just beyond these pine woods, here," he said, pointing to the growth on their left.

"That would be too far," she answered, following his gesture with a glance. "We had better go back."

"We can go back that way. It's good walking."

She did not answer, but he led on again, and she followed. "How still and warm it is!" she cried, with a luxurious surrender to the charm of the place. The slanting sun struck through the slender boles of the trees, and burnished the golden needles under their feet. There was no sound of life save their steps, and their voices, which took a lower key; the air was rich with the balsam of the trees. She deeply inhaled it. "Yes, yes," she murmured. "It all comes back. I was afraid," she said, in answer to the look with which he turned upon her, "that I had lost the feeling which I had when I first got well. But I haven't."

"What was it?"

"I don't know if I can tell. Something as if I belonged in such places—as if they missed me when I came away—I don't know. It was something very silly"— She stopped.

"Don't grieve the woodland by hurrying through it, then," said Ford with a playful-

ness which, now that he indulged it, seemed natural to him. "Wait a moment. This rock is a new feature,—I don't remember this." A vast boulder rose at the side of their path, and he walked round it and clambered to the top, from which he bent over to speak to her again. "Would you like to come up? It's quite easy on this side."

"What can you see?"

"Nearly the whole earth."

She found the opposite side of the rock a slope broken by some natural steps. He came half-way down, and, reaching her his hand, pulled her strongly up

The top was scantly wide enough for them both; and while he stood she sat at his feet and looked out at the landscape which a break in the woods revealed at that height. It was the valley in which the village and farms of the Shakers lay; but it stretched wider than they had ever seen it, and on the other side, beyond the river, the hills rose steeper. The red sunset bathed it in a misty light, through which shone the scarlet of the maples, the gold of the elms by the river, the tender crimson of the young growths in the swamp lands. On the hill-side some of the farm windows had caught the sun, and

blazed and flickered with mimic fire. Along a lower slope ran a silent train, marking its course with puffs of white steam.

"I can confess now," said Ford, "that if I hadn't climbed this rock I shouldn't have known just where we were. But here are all the landmarks." He pointed to the familiar barns and family houses below.

"How near we are!" she cried, looking down. "I felt as if we were miles away. These woods are not large enough to get lost in, are they?"

"Not now. They were, a minute ago." He sat down beside her, and they looked at the landscape together. "It's rather sightly, as Joseph says."

"We had better go down," she murmured. But neither of them made a movement to go. They sat looking at the valley. "Now the fire has caught the windows higher up," she said. They watched the glittering panes as they darkened and kindled. The windows of the highest farm-house flashed intensely, and then slowly blackened. A light blue haze hovered over the valley.

"The curtain is down," said Ford.

She started to her feet, and looked round. "Why, the sun has set!"

"Didn't you know that?" he asked.

"No," she said, sadly. "It seemed as if it would last longer. But nothing lasts."

"No, nothing lasts," he repeated. "But generally things last long enough. I could have stood another hour or two of sunset, however. And sometimes I 've known days that I would have been willing to have last for ever, if I could have had out my eternity in this world."

"Is that—is *that* the way you feel, too?" she asked, turning swiftly upon him that strange searching glance.

"Why, not always. What is the matter?"

"Nothing — nothing. Let us go down." She took his hand, and clung to it, in descending, as if eager to escape to him from some fear of him.

They went on in the direction they had first taken. She walked at his side, and when his pace fell to a slow saunter she did not attempt to hasten it. A red squirrel took shape and motion out of the russet needles, and raced up one of the pines, whose feathery tops he bent in his long leaps from tree to tree; a partridge suddenly whirred up from the path before them; the life was like shadow, the shadow was like life, as the twilight thickened round them.

"Are you tired?" he asked. "Am I making you walk too far?"

"I am not tired," she answered, but stopping as he stopped.

"I am. I'm out of breath," he said. "Do you know this place?"

She glanced round. "I believe I should know it if I were here alone. It looks familiar. It looks like the place where Laban found us that morning when we were trying to walk to Vardley Station. The brook ought to be running along in the hollow, here. Once he asked me if I knew the place; but I didn't. Do you think it 's the place?"

"How should I know? You never told me of it before."

"Then the fever must have begun," she mused aloud. "I thought—I must have thought you—were there! I oughtn't"—

"Oh," laughed Ford, "we put people in all sorts of places in dreams, feverish or otherwise. But I think the place you mean is lower down. I was in hopes you knew better where we were. I don't know."

Egeria laughed also. "Then we are lost!"

"Yes. Are you frightened?"

"I should hate to be lost here alone."

"I shall go presently and look up our whereabouts. Shall I go now?"

"If we keep walking we shall get through the woods in a few minutes. Which way are your chestnuts?"

"I don't know that, now, either. Do you care to look them up?"

"No. I thought you wanted them."

"I think it's better to stay here. No," he added, capriciously, "it's better to go home."

"Well," she responded with the same trusting content in which she had let all his impulses sway her.

A thrill, very wild and sweet, played through his nerves. "I—I"—he began; then suddenly, "Wait here!" he cried, and ran down to the brow of the hill along which the woodland stretched. "It's all right!" he called back, and he turned to retrace his steps. But she was no longer where he had left her. He disliked to call out to her; they were very near the house in which he lodged, and he did not wish to make an alarm. He pushed hither and thither through the gathering dusk, but he could not find her; and he blamed himself for having brought her into this embarrassment. He had once seen tramps in those woods; and now it would be almost dark when they reached home. All at once he came upon her at the foot of a tree, against

which she quietly leaned. "What are you doing here?" he demanded impatiently. "Why did you go away?" He thought he had spoken harshly; but she only seemed amused.

"I haven't moved. This is where you left me."

They both laughed at that. "I have been running everywhere, round and round, as lost people do in the Adirondacks, when they are going to write about it afterwards. It's absurd to be lost here. It's like being drowned in a saucer. Were you afraid?"

"No. What should I be afraid of?"

"Certainly not bears,—till I came up. Will you take my arm? I mustn't lose you again. Will they be uneasy about you?"

"Oh, they will know that I went away with you, and some of them will see us coming back together."

"Yes," said the young man.

"Besides, I can tell them that we missed the way."

"I 'm afraid if you do that they won't let you come with me again."

"I 'm afraid they won't believe me if I tell them *where* we got lost," she said. When they came to open ground, it was much lighter. "It isn' so late as I thought."

"No," he answered; "we were actually lost in that boundless forest by daylight. But it isn't so remarkable in my case as it is in yours, Miss Boynton. I don't know what mysterious influence you are going to say bewildered you."

"Influence?" she repeated, with a start.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing!" She withdrew her hand from his arm.

He looked round, and saw that they had reached the great stone bowl of the wayside fountain. A sense of hideous anomaly possessed him. "Did I become intolerable just here?" he demanded, bitterly. "Why do you endure me? You and your father ought to hate me. I have done you nothing but harm. Why do you ever speak to me? I ought to be abominable to you!"

"I don't know," she answered vaguely. "Do you think it is"—

He laughed harshly. "Inexplicable! You don't forget anything?"

"No," she reluctantly admitted. "I don't forget."

"I can understand your father's position. He suffers me upon some theory of his. But you,—you are a woman, and women don't forgive very easily. Come, Miss Boynton,"

he cried, mixing his self-banter with his pain, "confess that I am some malignant enchanter, and that I have the power of casting an ugly spell over you, that deprives you of the wholesome satisfaction of telling me that I 'm detestable."

"A spell," she began; but her voice died weakly away, and she stood looking into his face with puzzled entreaty.

"If you would tell me once for all that I am the greatest ruffian in the world, with neither pity nor decency, it might break the charm, and then I could go away to-morrow morning. I 've been waiting for that. Will you try?"

"I can't say that," she murmured.

"But you believe it?"

"No"—

"That 's part of the sorcery. You must have often tried to believe it."

She was silent, and he felt that her silence was full of distress. She turned away with a sort of helplessness; he followed her, trying to retrieve himself. But he could not find anything to say, and they scarcely spoke as they walked back through the village. At the gate of the office her parting with him was almost a flight.

XXII.

THE next day Ford came, and found Egeria on the threshold, where she often met him. At first glance he thought he read in her face something like an impulse to run from him; but she quelled the impulse, if she had it, and greeted him with a resolute coldness, which he would not recognise. He had a broad yellow hickory leaf in one hand, and on this lay a little heap of blackberries; they were long and narrow like mulberries, and they had hung on the canes, hoarding the last sweetness of the year. "Perhaps your father will like these," he said; and he told her of the hollow beside the road in which he had found them. "They 've got all that was left of the summer in them," he added. "Will you have them?"

"I don't believe they would be good for him," she began stiffly.

Ford tossed them away. "How is the doctor to-day?" he asked.

"He 's better. Will you come in?"

"No, thank you. I am going to the post-office. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said, and they exchanged a look of mutual dismay, which hardened into pride before their eyes dropped.

At the post-office Ford found a letter for Egeria, and carried it to Humphrey, who put it away in his desk, and said he would give it to her when she came in.

"It don't seem the same handwritin' as the other. I don't know," he said, shutting his desk-lid, "as you heard that they got a letter this mornin' from a lawyer down 't their place. As I understood from Frances, —Egeria read it to her,—the gran'father 's left Egery what prop'ty there was. The' wa'n't no great, I guess."

The fact jarred upon Ford. Against all sense he connected it with her changed manner, for which, till then, he had found reason enough in the terms of their parting the day before. This legacy seemed the world thrusting in between them; it was as if it crossed some purpose, broke some hope, of his.

He stopped mechanically, on his way home, in the hollow of the roadside where he had found the blackberries, and looked

idly at the canes. Presently he saw that there were no berries left on them. He was turning away, when a sound like suppressed laughter caught his ear. There was a rustle in a thicket near, and Egeria and one of the youngest Shakeresses came out.

"We have got them all," said the former; she blushed appealingly, while the latter still giggled. "I didn't suppose you would come again. When we saw you looking so, Susan couldn't help laughing." Ford reddened with embarrassment. "It seems greedy to take them. I didn't suppose—I never thought of your wanting them. Will you—will you—take some?" She offered him her basket.

"Thanks," he said, awkwardly refusing, "I don't care for them. I'm glad you 've found them."

He turned and walked off, leaving her where she stood, with her basket still extended towards him. She watched him out of sight, and then made a few paces after him. On a sudden she dropped her basket, and sinking down hid her face on her knees. The Shakeress picked up the basket and the berries which were jostled out of it, and stood passively near, looking at Egeria for what seemed a long time.

There came a sound of wheels. "Is that you, Susan?" called Elihu from the road.

"Yee," promptly answered the Shakeress.

Egeria sprang to her feet, and seized the basket from her. "Come! come!" she whispered, and fled further into the woods.

But the girl did not follow her. She went out into the road, where Elihu sat in his buggy, and stood demurely waiting his question.

"Was that Egeria?"

"Yee."

"Why did she run away?"

"She was crying."

"What made her cry?"

The girl was silent.

"What made her cry?" repeated Elihu.

"She had got all the berries, when Friend Ford came, and he seemed kind of put out."

"Get in with me," said Elihu. "You should not be here alone."

In the evening Elihu went to the office, and joined the office sisters in their sitting-room. One of them took his hat and cane, and the other pulled a rocking-chair towards the air-tight stove, in which a new fire was softly roaring.

"The evenings begin to be chilly, now," he said.

"Yee," answered Rebecca, "the days are shortening. Did you find the folks all well at Harshire?"

"Yee," he said; and then he sat rocking himself absently and somewhat sadly to and fro, while the sisters, with their hands in their laps, passively waited for him to speak further. Humphrey, hearing his voice, came in from his room, and Laban followed. Sister Frances, with her pale cheeks a little brightened by her walk across from the infirmary, entered the other door. Elihu lifted his voice. "But I didn't find all the folks here so well."

"Why, what do you mean, Elihu?" cried Diantha. "Is anybody sick with you?"

"Is Friend Boynton worse?" Humphrey asked, turning his head up towards Frances, who was still on foot, while he was seated.

"Nay," answered Frances, fluttered with anxiety and curiosity; "he is uncommon bright and well, to-night."

"It is no sickness of the body that I mean, and yet it is a disease of this life only. I hardly know how to say what I suspect,—or rather feel sure of." His listeners did not interrupt him, but waited in resignation for his next word. He looked round at

their faces. "Egeria is getting foolish about Friend Ford."

"For shame, Elihu!" exclaimed Frances, with an indignant impulse. The rest stirred uneasily in their chairs, but did not speak.

Elihu looked kindly at Frances, but he did not address her directly in adding, "As I was coming home this afternoon, I met Friend Ford down at the turn of the road, looking strange and excited. He didn't seem to see me, and he went on without speaking. I thought I saw Susan among the bushes, and I called to her."

"I sent her!" Frances broke in. "I sent her in my place, because I couldn't leave Friend Boynton, and Egery wanted to go and get some late blackberries for him that Friend Edward had told her about." Frances, by right of her special tenderness for the Boyntons, always spoke of Ford by his first name.

"Yee," replied Elihu gently, "so Susan told me,—she is a good child. She told me that Friend Ford had found them there, and because he had seemed vexed Egeria had shed tears."

"It was because they had got all the berries, and she thought it would look selfish

and greedy to him," Frances interposed a second time.

"Yee," Elihu again consented, "so Susan told me. It is not the only time that I feared she had got to feeling foolish about him."

"Foolish about him!" Frances could not contain herself. "She would *never* feel foolish about a young man! And if she felt foolish about him he would feel foolish about her, too!"

"Yee," said Elihu. "They have been driving and walking together, — picking leaves and grapes and berries. He stops in the orchard in the afternoon, and talks with her by the hour."

"It's while her father's asleep," explained Frances. "Whenever Friend Boynton's awake, Edward talks with him. You wouldn't want *him* waked up out of his sleep to talk, would you?"

"Nay," said Elihu, while the faintest smile moved his lips, in kindly derision of the inefficiency of Frances's defence. "Friend Ford writes in the morning, and Friend Boynton sleeps in the afternoon."

"Elihu!" cried Frances, angrily.

"Frances," returned Elihu, with re-established gravity, "will you tell me yourself that you have never thought they were

foolish about each other,—what they call being in love?"

Frances wiped the tears from her eyes with her stout handkerchief, which she had knotted into a ball. "You are too bad, Elihu. You have no right to ask such a question. You hadn't ought to put me on trial."

"You put yourself on trial, Frances," said Elihu, affectionately. "You began to talk while I was speaking. But I withdraw the question. I never meant to hurt your feelings. I know you have always done for the best."

"I have often heard you say," Frances quavered reproachfully, "that the worst thing about our young people, when they get to foolin', is that they run away. You said that if they would only tell us honestly how they felt we would let them go and be married, and we would be friends with them afterwards. Now, when there are two young folks here that don't think of runnin' away, or hidin' anything, you're not satisfied. Do you want Egery and Edward to run away?"

"Nay," replied Elihu; "do you want them to be courting each other here, right under our noses?"

"It *isn't* under our noses!" cried Frances, resenting the phrase.

"Well, our eyes, then," said Elihu, patiently. "Do you think it is a good example to the rest of our young folks?"

"They're not of our family! They've never been gathered in!"

"Nay, I know that," admitted Elihu. "But does that help the matter, as far as the example goes? We all know by bitter experience how hard it is for the young to tread the path that leads to the angelic life; how cruelly it is beset with flints and shards, and how the flesh bleeds with the sting of its brambles. Do you want them mocked with the sight of flowers that tempt them to the earthly pastures? Egeria is a good girl"—

"Oh, she *is*, she *is!*" sobbed Frances.

"And I don't believe she understands herself that she's foolish about him"—

"I *know* she doesn't! It would kill her!"

"Nay, I'm not sure of that," said Elihu, with another flicker of a smile. "But that makes the case easier to deal with. We need not speak to her at all. We can speak to the young man."

"Speak to the young man!" cried Frances. "Tell him that Egery is in love with him

before he has ever asked her"— She stopped in horror.

"We do not gloss this thing among ourselves," said Elihu coldly, "and we need not care for the feints and pretences used in the world outside. But we can tell him that he's foolish about her. I have talked the matter over with Joseph and the ministers, and we have agreed that Friend Ford should be spoken to." Frances went out of the room, turning her back upon the meditated outrage. "The only question now is," continued Elihu, without regarding her withdrawal, "who shall speak to him."

A perceptible sensation passed through the others, but no one answered. After a moment, Laban said from the corner where he sat, "Some like bellin' the cat." The sisters relieved the tension of their nerves in a low titter, but Elihu and Humphrey remained grave; and it is doubtful if Laban really intended a joke, though his face relaxed at the merriment of the sisters.

"The ministers," resumed Elihu, "were not sure whether it was the province of the elders or the trustees, and I came to consider that point with you, Humphrey."

Humphrey rose, with his face twisted by an expression as of severe bodily pain. He

moved his arms haplessly about, and took off and then put on his spectacles. He tried in vain to smile. "I d' know," he said, "as I'm a very good hand at speakin' to folks. I don't seem to have any command o' language. I should think myself, it was for the elders, some on 'em, to speak."

"You have transacted all the business with the young man," said Elihu. "You have had frequent interviews with him, and you go a good deal into the world, on business. We thought, perhaps, that you would best know how to approach him."

"I ain't one to get acquainted easy," replied Humphrey, "and I never felt no ways at home with Friend Ford. He seems to be of a kind of offish disposition." He sat down again, and hanging his head began to tilt the chair in front of him on its hind legs. "I shouldn't want to intrude no ways into the province of the elders. I don't seem to feel that it 's so much of a business question as what it is a question of family discipline."

"You may be right," admitted Elihu.

"If I could see it as my duty, I shouldn't be one to shirk it. But it 's like this." He paused unsuccessfully for a comparison, and then added, "It 's a question of family dis-

cipline. I should ha' thought it was for the ministers to speak."

"We should only have recourse to the ministers in extreme cases," said Elihu. "Besides, you thought just now it was for the elders to speak."

"Well, the elders *or* the ministers," returned Humphrey, without looking up.

Elihu compassionated his futility with a moment's silence. Then he sighed slightly, and said, "I agree with you, Humphrey. But I thought that I ought to give you the opportunity, and if you saw your duty in it I ought to yield to you. I did not want to have the appearance of forth-putting, in such a case, and I certainly don't covet the task of speaking to Friend Ford. He appears to me a person subject to sudden gusts of anger, and there is no telling how he may take the interference."

"That is so," admitted one of the sisters.

"There ain't no question about forth-puttin', Elihu," said Humphrey, with the cordiality of a great relief. "Every one 'd know t' you didn't seek such a duty. But Friend Ford 'll take it all right; you 'll see. He 'll look at it in the same light you do."

Elihu rose, and took his hat and stick.

"I shall probably find him in his room, now, I suppose."

Humphrey stood as much aghast as it was in his power to do. "Was you—you wa'n't goin' to speak to him right away?"

"Yee. Why should I put it off? He cannot take it any better to-morrow or next week than he would to-night. And the trouble wouldn't grow less if we waited till doomsday." Elihu went out; the closing of the hall-door upon him was like an earthquake to those within.

"I declare for it," said Laban, "I 'most feel like goin' along down to Friend Ford's and waitin' outside."

"Well," observed Rebecca, slighting the bold proposition, "Elihu never *was* one to be afraid."

"That is so, Rebecca," said Diantha.

Humphrey said nothing. The accumulation and complication of evils brought upon the family by the Boyntons had long passed his control.

XXIII.

ELIHU walked rapidly down the moonlighted street. When he reached the old family house, he groped his way up from the outer door to that of the meeting-room, in which Ford lodged, and tapped upon it with his stick. There was the sort of hesitation within which follows upon surprise and doubt; then the sound of a chair pushed back was heard, and Ford came to the door with a lamp in his hand; he looked like one startled out of a deep reverie. "Anything the matter with Dr. Boynton?" he asked, after a gradual recognition of Elihu.

"Nay," replied the Shaker. "Friend Boynton is better than usual, I believe. I wish to have a little talk with you, Friend Ford. Shall I come in?"

Ford found that he was holding the door ajar, and blocking the entrance. "Why, certainly," he said. He led the way, and setting the lamp on the table pushed up another chair to the corner fireplace, where

some logs were burning, and where he had evidently been sitting. "Sit down."

The Shaker obeyed, and with his palms resting on his knees craned his neck round and peered at the different corners of the room and up at the ceiling before he spoke. "Are you comfortable here, Friend Ford?"

"Yes," answered the young man. "I am a sort of stray cat, and any garret is home to me. I can't say, though, that I've ever occupied the dwelling of a whole community before."

"Yee, this building once housed a good many people. It was a cross to leave it; but our numbers have fallen away, and we crowd together for comfort and encouragement. It's an instinct, I suppose. Well, what do you think of the Shakers, so far, Friend Ford?" Elihu had an astute glimmer in his eye as he asked the question.

"Really, I hardly know what to say," answered Ford.

"Say what you think. We may not like the truth, but we always desire to hear it."

"I should probably say nothing offensive to you, if I said all that's in my mind. I believe I think very well of you. I don't see why you don't succeed. I don't see why you don't supply to Protestantism the very re-

fuge from the world that we talk of envying in Catholicism."

"That is much the position that Friend Boynton took."

"I don't understand why you are a failing body. The world has tired and hopeless people enough to throng ten thousand such villages as yours."

"We should hardly be satisfied with the weary and discouraged," said Elihu, without resentment. "And our system offers few attractions. Folks are not so anxious for the angelic life in heaven that they want to begin it on earth."

Ford smiled. "You offer shelter, you offer a home and perfect immunity from care and anxiety."

"But we require great sacrifices," rejoined the Shaker gravely. "We put husband and wife asunder; we bid the young renounce the dream of youth; we say to the young man, Forego; to the young girl, Forget. We exact celibacy, the supreme self-offering to a higher life. Even if we did not consider celibacy essential to the angelic life, we should feel it to be essential to communism. We must exact it, as the one inviolable condition."

Ford sat a moment thinking. "I dare

say you are right." He looked interested in what Elihu was saying, and he added, as if to prompt him to further talk, "I have been thinking about it a good deal since I've been here, and I don't see how you can have communism on any other terms. But then your communism perishes, because nature is the stronger, and because you can't recruit your numbers from the children of your adherents. You must look for accessions from the enemy."

"Yee, that is one of our difficulties. And we have to fight the enemy within our gates perpetually. Even such of us as have peace in our own hearts must battle in behalf of the weaker brethren. We must especially guard the young against the snares of their own fancies."

"I dare say it keeps you busy," said Ford.

"It does. We must guard them from both the knowledge and the sight of love." The word brought a flush to the young man's face, which Elihu did not fail to note. "Friend Ford, I have understood you to wish us well?" He rose, and resting his arm on the chimney-piece looked down with gentle earnestness into the face of the young man, as he sat leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Yes, certainly."

"You would not wittingly betray us?"

"Really"—

"I don't mean that. You wouldn't knowingly put any obstacle in our way,—any stumbling-block before the feet of those whom we are trying to lead towards what we think the true life?"

"Elihu," said Ford, "I thoroughly respect you all, and I should be grieved to interfere with you. Why do you ask me these questions? Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my behaviour here?"

"Nothing," continued Elihu, "is so hard to combat in the minds of our young folks as the presence of that feeling in others who consider it holy and heavenly, while we teach that it is of the earth, earthy."

"Well?"

"The more right and fit it appears, the more complex and subtle is the effect of such an example. It is impossible that we should tolerate it a moment among us after we become convinced of its existence. Self-defence is the law of life."

"Well, well!" cried Ford, getting up in his turn, and confronting Elihu on more equal terms, "what has all this to do with me?" His face was red, and his voice impatient.

Elihu was not disturbed. He asked calmly, "Don't you know that Egeria is in love with you?"

Ford stood breathless a moment. "Good heavens, man!" he shouted. "Her father is at death's door!"

Elihu stood with his wide-brimmed hat resting on one hand; he turned it slowly round with the other. "Friend Boynton is very strangely sick. The doctor says he doesn't know how long he may last. Young people soon lose the sense of danger which is not immediate. The kind of love I speak of is the master-feeling of the human heart; it flourishes in the very presence of death; it grows upon sorrow that seems to kill. It knows how to hide itself from itself. It takes many shapes, and calls itself by many other names. We have seen much to make us think we are right about Egeria. Have you seen nothing?"

Ford did not reply. His thoughts ran back over all the times that he had seen and spoken with Egeria, and his heart slowly and deeply beat, like some alien thing intent upon the result; and then it leaped forward with a bound.

"Perhaps," said the Shaker, "I am wrong to put the question in the way I do. We

deal so plainly with ourselves and with one another in such cases that I might well forget the sophistication that the world outside requires in the matter. I do not wish to do you injustice, and I shall be glad if I have opened my mind for nothing. I will merely ask whether you have not done anything or said anything to make her like you."

"This is preposterous," said Ford. "Do you think these are the circumstances for love-making? I am here very much against my will, because I can't decently abandon a friendless man"—

"Friend Boynton has plenty of friends here," interrupted Elihu.

."I beg your dardon; I know that. Then I am here because I can't leave a dying man who seems to find comfort in my presence. And whatever may be the security which Miss Boynton has fallen into, I have had her father to remind me of his danger by constant allusions to it, as if his death were near at hand."

"Do you believe it is?"

"That isn't the question. The question is whether a man, being trusted with a knowledge of dangers which she doesn't know, could have any such feeling towards

her as you imagine." Ford bent a look of angry demand upon the Shaker.

"Yee," the latter answered, "I think he could, if he meant the best that love means. If he knew that they were poor, and that after her father's death she would be left alone in the world, he might very well look on her with affection even across a dying pillow, and desire to be the protector and the stay of her helplessness. I don't wish to pry into your concerns, and if there is nothing between you and Egeria it will be enough for you to say so."

"Between us!" cried Ford, bitterly. "I will tell you how I first met these people, and then you shall judge how much reason there is for love between her and me."

"Nay," interjected Elihu, "there is no need of a reason for love. I learned that before I was gathered in."

Ford did not regard the interruption. "I saw them first at a public exhibition, and I made up my mind that Dr. Boynton was an impostor; and then I went to their house with this belief. I never believed his daughter was anything but his tool, the victim of himself and the woman of the house who did the tricking. I suspected tricking in the dark, but when I attempted to seize her

hand it was Miss Boynton's hand that I caught, and I hurt her—like the ruffian I was. Afterwards the old man tried to face me down, and we had a quarrel; and I saw him next that morning here, when he flew at my throat. It 's been his craze to suppose that I thwarted his control over his daughter, and he has regarded me as his deadliest enemy. Now you can tell how much love is lost between us." Ford turned scornfully away and walked the length of the room.

The Shaker remained in his place. "Egeria is of a very affectionate and believing disposition. She would take a pleasure in forgiving any unkindness, and she would forgive it so that it would never have been. I don't see any cause in what you say to change my mind. If you told me that you did not care for her, it would be far more to the point than all you could say to show *why* you don't."

Ford stopped, and glared at the serene figure and placid countenance. "This is too much," he began, and then he paused, and they regarded each other.

"You don't pretend now," resumed Elihu, "that you suspect either of them of wrong."

"No!"

"Then, whatever the mystery is about them, you know that they are good folks. We have had much more cause than you to suspect them, but I don't doubt them any more than I doubt myself."

"I would stake my life on her truth!" exclaimed Ford. The Shaker could not repress the glimmer of a smile. "I"— Ford paused. Then he burst out, "I have been a hypocrite,—the worst kind; a hypocrite to my own deceit! I *do* love her! She is dearer to me than— You talk of your angelic life! Can you dream of anything nearer the bliss of heaven than union with such tenderness and mercy as hers?"

"We say nothing against marriage in its place. A true marriage is the best thing in the earthly order. But it *is* of the earthly order. The angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. We seek to be perfect, as we are divinely bidden. If you choose to be less than perfect"—

"There can be no higher choice than love like hers. Do you assume"—

"Nay," said the Shaker, "I assume nothing. The time has been when we hoped that Egeria might be gathered in. But that time is past. She could now never be one of us without suffering that we could not ask

her to undergo. She must follow the leadings of her own heart, now."

"Why, man, you have no right to say that she cares anything for me. It 's atrocious ; it 's"—

"We pass no censure upon the feeling between you," said Elihu quietly, looking into his hat, as if he were about to put it on. "All we ask is that you will not let the sight of your affection be a snare to those whose faces should be set against such things."

Ford regarded him with a stormy look ; but he controlled himself, and asked coldly, "What do you wish me to do ?"

"Nay ; that is for you to decide."

"Well, I must go away !" Ford irefully stared at the Shaker again. "But how can I go away ? If there was ever any reason why I should remain, the reason is now stronger than ever."

"Yee," said Elihu.

"What shall I do ? If I have not been strong enough and honest enough with myself to keep from drifting into this—this affair, it is not likely that I can get out of it,—I don't want to get out of it ! Do you suppose that now I have the hope of her I wish to leave her ? Whatever her father's

state is, and whatever my duty to him is, I am bound to stay here for her sake till she sends me away. It 's my duty, it 's my privilege."

Elihu was not visibly swept from his feet by this lover's-logic. He said gravely, "Now you consult your inclination rather than your sense of duty. Friend Boynton and his daughter are here by virtue of the charity we use towards all"—

"You shall be paid every cent!" cried Ford impulsively.

"Nay, I didn't boast," said the Shaker, with a gentle reproof in his tone, which put the young man to shame, "and I didn't merit this return from you. I merely stated a fact. You are yourself here by our concession as their friend. I have opened our mind to you upon this matter, and you know just how we feel. Farewell."

XXIV.

IN his pre-occupation Ford let Elihu find his way out, and heard him stumbling and groping about for the outer door in the dark. All night the words and circumstances of the interview burned in his heart, and his face was hot with a transport half shameful and half sweet. Once he tried to think when his old misgivings had vanished, but he could not; he only remembered them to spurn them. In the morning he went out for a long walk, and visited the places where he had been with her. He had a formless fear and hope that he might meet her; these conflicting emotions resolved themselves into the resignation with which he went to the shop where Elihu was at work.

"I am going away. I have no right to stay here; it's a violation of your rights, and it's a profanation of her. I shall go away, but I shall never give up the hope of speaking to her at the right time and place, and asking her to be my wife."

Seeing that he expected an answer, Elihu said, "You cannot do less."

Ford did not quite like the answer. "You don't understand. I hope for nothing,—I have no reason to hope for anything."

"Nay," said the Shaker, "I don't understand that. She is fond of you."

Ford reddened, but he did not resent the words. "What I propose to do now—to-day—is to go away, and to come back from time to time, with your leave, and see how Dr. Boynton is doing. I should like some of you to write to me,—I should like to write to her. Would you have any objection to that? You don't object to the fact, but to the appearance in this—affair, as I understand. The letters could come under cover to Sister Frances," he submissively suggested.

"Nay," answered the Shaker, after deliberation, "I don't see how we could object to that."

"Thanks," said Ford, with a nervous sigh. "I hope you will feel it right that I should see Dr. Wilson, and ask his opinion of Dr. Boynton's condition, before I go?"

"Yee. There is Dr. Wilson, now." Elihu leaned out and beckoned to him, and the doctor, who was turning away from the

office gate, stopped his horse in the middle of the street. "You can ask him now; he has just seen Friend Boynton." Elihu delicately refrained from joining Ford in going to speak with the doctor.

"I have to go away for a while," said the young man, abruptly, "and I wanted to ask you whether there is any immediate danger in Dr. Boynton's case to prevent my going. I shouldn't like to leave him at a critical moment."

"No," said the doctor, with the slowness of his thought. "It's one of those obscure cases. I find him very well,—very well, indeed, considering. It's the nature of his disease to make this sort of pause. It's often a very long pause."

Ford went back to Elihu, whom he found quietly at work again. "He says there's no reason why I shouldn't go," he reported, with the excitement of a new purpose in his face. He waited a moment before he added, "I must go and tell Dr. Boynton, now. I confess I don't know exactly how to do it."

"Yee, it will be quite a little cross," Elihu admitted.

"Do you think," asked Ford, after a moment's abstraction, "that there would

be anything wrong in speaking to him about —what we have spoken of?"

"Nay," said Elihu. "I was thinking that perhaps you might like to do that. It would set his mind at rest, perhaps."

"Thank you," said Ford, but he bit his nail in perplexity and hesitation.

"I presume that will be quite a cross, too," added Elihu, quaintly.

Ford stared at him without perceiving his jest. "I suppose you don't know what you've done in giving me the sort of hope you have! If you have mocked a drowning man with a straw"—

Rapt as he was in his own thoughts, when he entered the sick man's room he could not but be aware of some great change in Boynton. When they had last seen each other, Boynton had sat up in an arm-chair to receive his visitor. Now he was stretched upon the bed, and he looked very old and frail.

"Why, the doctor said you were better!" cried the young man.

"So I am,—or so I was, half an hour ago," replied Boynton. "I am glad you have come early to-day. I missed you yesterday; and there is something now on which I want the light of your clearest

judgment. Sit down," he said politely, seeing that Ford had remained on foot.

The young man mechanically drew up a chair, and sat facing him.

"I have heard a story of Agassiz," Boynton said, "to the effect that when he had read some book wholly upsetting a theory he had laboured many years to establish, he was so glad of the truth that his personal defeat was nothing to him. He exulted in his loss, because it was the gain of science. I have not the magnanimity of Agassiz, I find, though I have tried to pursue my inquiries in the same spirit of scientific devotion. Perhaps I had a great deal more at stake: there is a difference between seeking to ascertain some fact of natural science and endeavouring to place beyond question the truth of a future existence."

He plainly expected some sort of acquiescence, and Ford cleared his throat to assent to the preposterous vanity of his speech: "Certainly."

"You will bear me witness," said Boynton, "that I have readily, even cheerfully, relinquished positions which I had carefully taken and painfully built upon, so long as their loss did not lead to doubt of this great truth,—did not weaken the citadel, so to speak."

"Yes," said Ford, with blank expectancy.

"You know I have rested my hopes upon a power, which I believed my daughter to possess, of communicating with the world of spirits?"

"Yes."

"You remember that I abandoned without a murmur the hypothesis of your adverse control when that was no longer tenable?"

He was so anxious for Ford's explicit assent that the young man again answered, "Yes."

"And when I was forced to accept the conclusion that her power was limited by a certain nervous condition, and had for ever passed away with her restoration to complete health, did you find any childish disposition in me to shrink from the truth?"

"No," said Ford, "I did not."

"I thank you!" cried Boynton. "These successive strokes, hard as they were to bear, had nothing mortal to my hopes in them. Now, I have had my death-blow." Ford began a kindly dissent; but Boynton waved him to silence. "Unless your trained eye can see some way out of the conclusions to which I am now brought, I must give up the whole hypothesis of communion with disembodied life, and with that hypothesis my

belief in that life itself. In other words, I have received my death-blow."

No doubt Boynton still enjoyed his own rhetoric, and had a measurable consolation in his powers of graphic statement; but there was a real passion in his words, and the young man was moved by the presence of a veritable despair. "What facts, or reasons, have brought you to your conclusions?" he asked.

Boynton pushed his hand up under his pillow, and drew out an old copy of a magazine. "Here is what might have saved me years of research and of hopes as futile as those of the seekers for the philosopher's stone, if I had seen it in time." Though he laid the book on the coverlet, he kept his hand on it, and had evidently no intention that Ford should look at it for himself. "There is a paper in this magazine giving an account of a girl, in this very region, possessing powers so identical in all essentials with those of my daughter that there can be no doubt of their common origin. Wherever this unhappy creature appeared the most extraordinary phenomena attended her: raps were evoked; tables were moved; bells were rung; flashes of light were seen; and violent explosions were heard. The writer was not

blinded by the fool's faith that lured me on. He sought a natural cause for these unnatural effects, and he found that by insulating the posts of the girl's bedstead—for these things mostly occurred during her sleep—he controlled them perfectly. She was simply surcharged with electricity. After a while she fell into a long sickness, from which she imperfectly recovered, and she died in a madhouse." Boynton removed his hand from the magazine, as if to let Ford now see for himself, and impressively waited his movement.

"Excuse me," said the young man, who found the parallel extremely distasteful, "but I don't see the identity of the cases. Miss Boynton seems the perfection of health, and"—

"Yes," interrupted Boynton, "there is that merciful difference. But I cannot base my self-forgiveness upon that. So far as my recklessness is concerned, her health and her sanity might have been sacrificed where her childhood has been wasted and her happiness destroyed. Poor girl! Poor girl!"

"I think you exaggerate," Ford began, but Boynton interrupted him:—

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know! I couldn't exaggerate the sum of her sufferings at my hands. To be wrenched from a

home in which she was simply happy, and from love that was immeasurably wiser and more unselfish than mine ; to be thrust on to the public exhibition of abnormal conditions that puzzled and terrified her ; to be made the partner of my defeat and shame ; to be forced to share my aimless vagabondage and abject poverty, houseless, friendless, exposed to suspicion and insult and danger,—that is the fate to which I brought her ; and for what ? For a delusion that ends in chaos ! Oh, my God ! And here I lie at last, a sick beggar, sheltered by the charity of these Shakers, whose kindness I have insulted, and a sorrow and shame to the child whose young life I have blighted,—here I lie, stripped to the last shred of hope in anything, here or hereafter. Oh, young man ! I once thought that you were hard upon me, and I resented the blame you spoke as outrage ; but now I confess it merciful justice. You have your triumph !"

"Don't say that !" cried Ford. "I never was more ashamed of what I said to you there in Boston than I am at this moment, and I never felt the need of your kindness so much. I believe that if Miss Boynton were here, and understood it all, she would feel nothing but pity "—

"Oh, does that make it different? Does that right the wrong which has been done?"

"Yes," cried the young man, with a fervour that came he knew not how or whence, "forgiveness *does* somehow right a wrong! It must be so, or else this world is not a world of possibilities and recoveries, but a hopeless hell. Why, look!" He spoke as if Egeria were before them. "Have you ever seen her stronger, younger, more"— The image he had conjured up seemed to shine upon him with a smile that reflected itself upon his lips, and a thrill of tenderness passed through him. "No one could do her harm that her own goodness couldn't repair."

Boynton was not one to refuse the comfort of such rapture. "Yes, you are right. She *is* unharmed by all that she has suffered. I have at least that comfort." Then he underwent a quick relapse. "But whether I have harmed her or not, the fact remains that she had never any supernatural power, and I return through all my years of experiment and research to the old ground,—the ground which I once occupied, and which you have never left,—the ground of materialism. It is doubtless well to have some-

thing under the foot, if it is only a lump of lifeless adamant."

"I find it hard not to imagine something better than this life when I think of Miss Boynton!" exclaimed Ford impetuously.

"Very true," said the doctor, accepting the tribute without perceiving the passion in it; "there has always been that suggestion of diviner goodness in her loving, self-devoted nature. But she had no more supernatural power than you or I, and the whole system of belief which I had built upon the hypothesis of its existence in her lies a heap of rubbish. And here at death's door I am without a sense of anything but darkness and the void beyond." A silence ensued, which Boynton broke with a startling appeal: "In the name of God,—in the name of whatever is better and greater than ourselves, — give me some hope! Speak! Say something from your vantage-ground of health and strength! Let me have some hope. I am not a coward. I am not afraid of torment. I should not be afraid of it if I had ever willed wrong to any living creature, and I know that I have not. But this darkness rushing back upon me, after years of faith and surety—it 's unendurable! Give me some hope! A word comes from you

at times that does not seem of your own authority: speak! Say it!"

"You have the hope that the world has had for eighteen hundred years," answered Ford, deeply moved.

"Was that first in your thoughts?" Boynton swiftly rejoined. "Was it all you could think of?"

"It was first in my thoughts, it was all I could think of," repeated Ford.

"But you have rejected that hope."

"It left me. It seemed to have left me. I don't realise it now as a faith, but I realise that it was always present somewhere in me. It may be different with those who come after us, to whom it will never have been imparted; but we who were born in it,—how can we help it, how can we escape it?"

"Is that really true?" mused Boynton aloud. "Do we come back only to that at last? Have you ever spoken with a clergyman about it?"

"Oh, no!" cried Ford.

"I should like to talk with a clergyman —I should like to talk with the church about it! There must be something in organisation— But it is of no use, now! Theories, theories, theories! A thousand formulas repeat themselves to me; the air

is full of them; I can read and hear them." He put his hands under his head and clasped them there. "And there is absolutely nothing else but that? Nothing in science?"

"No."

"Nothing of hope in the new metaphysics?"

"No, nothing."

"Nothing in the philosophy that applies the theories of science to the moral world?"

"Nothing but death."

"Then that *is* the only hope,—that old story of a credulous and fabulous time, resting upon hearsay and the witness of the ignorant, the pedantic wisdom of the learned, the interest of a church lustful of power; and that allegory of the highest serving the lowest, the best suffering for the worst,—that is still the world's only hope!" He paused; and then he recurred to the thought which he had dropped: "A clergyman,—a priest!—I should like to know the feelings of such a man. He fulfils an office with which his order has been clothed for two thousand years; he bears the tradition of authority which is as old as the human race; he claims to derive from Christ himself the touch of blessing and of healing for the broken spirit. I have often thought of that,

—what a sacred and awful commission it must be, if we admit its divine origin! Yes, I should like to know the feelings of such a man. I wonder if he feels his authority perpetually reconsecrated by the anguish, the fears, the prayers, the trembling hopes, of all those who have lain upon beds of death, or wept over them! Poor human soul, it should make him superhuman! What a vast cumulative power of consolation must come to a priest in our time! He is the church incarnate, the vicar of Christ, the helpful brother of the helpless human race, —it 's a tremendous thought. I should like to talk with such a man."

"Would you really like to see a minister?" asked Ford. "Because"—

"No,—no," said Boynton. "At least, not now, not yet; not till I have clearly formulated my ideas. But there are certainly some points that I should like to discuss— Oh, words, words! Phrases, phrases,—this glibness tires me to death! I can't get any foot-hold on it—I slip on it as if it were ice." He lay in a silence which Ford did not interrupt, and which he broke himself at last in a mood of something like philosophical cheerfulness: "I can find reason, if not consolation, for my failure,—reason in the

physical world. I shall take the first opportunity of committing my ideas to paper. Has it never struck you as very extraordinary that all the vast mass of evidence which has been accumulating in favour of spiritualism for the last twenty years, until now it is literally immense, should have no convincing power whatever with those who have not been convinced by their own senses? Why should I, as soon as personal proof failed me, instantly lapse from faith in it?"

"I am afraid," Ford said, "that I have not thought sufficiently about the matter."

"I believe I can explain why," Boynton continued. "It is because it is not spiritualism at all, but materialism,—a grosser materialism than that which denies; a materialism that asserts and affirms, and appeals for proof to purely physical phenomena. All other systems of belief, all other revelations of the unseen world, have supplied a rule of life, have been given for our *use* here. But this offers nothing but the barren fact that we live again. If it has had any effect upon morals, it has been to corrupt them. I cannot see how it is better in its effect upon this world than sheer atheism. It is as thoroughly godless as atheism itself, and no man can accept it upon any

other man's word, because it has not yet shown its truth in the ameliorated life of men. It leaves them where it found them, or else a little worse for the conceit with which it fills them. Yes, yes; I see now. I see it all."

The vigour of his speculative power buoyed him triumphantly above the abyss into which other men would have sunk. Ford listened with the fascination which the peculiar workings of Boynton's mind had always had for him, and he felt his heart warm towards him with sympathy that was at once respectful and amused, as he thus constructed a new theory out of the ruin of all his old theories.

"All the research in that direction," Boynton presently continued, "has been upon a false basis, and if anything has been granted it has been in mockery of an unworthy hope. I wonder that I was never struck before by that element of derision in it. The Calvinist gets Calvinism, the Unitarian Unitarianism; each carries away from communion with spirits the things that he brought. If men live again, it has been found that they live only in a frivolous tradition of their life in this world. Poor creatures! they seem lamed of half themselves,—the better half that aspires and advances; they hover in a

dull stagnation, just above this ball of mire; they have nothing to tell us; they bring us no comfort and no wisdom. Annihilation is better than such an immortality!"

Ford saw that Boynton did not expect any comment from him, and he did not interrupt his monologue. "What I ought to have asked was not whether there was a life hereafter, but whether there was a life hereafter worth living. I stopped short of the vital question. I fancied that it was essential to men to know surely that they should live again; but now I recognise that it is not essential in itself." He lay musing a while, and then resumed, "I had got them to bring me a Bible before you came in. I wanted to consult it upon a point raised by Elihu, yesterday. There are a great many new ideas in the Bible," he added, simply; "a great many new ideas in Job, and David, and Ecclesiastes, and Paul,—a *great* many in Paul. Would you mind handing it to me from the table? Oh, thanks!" he said, as he took the volume which Ford rose to give him. "This old record, which keeps the veil drawn so close, and lets the light I wanted glimmer out so sparely in a few promises and warnings, against the agonised passion of the Cross, or flings the

curtain wide upon the sublime darkness of the Apocalypse, is very clear upon this point. It tells us that we shall live hereafter in the blessing of our good will and the curse of our evil will; the question whether we shall live at all is left in abeyance, as if it were too trivial for affirmation. What a force it has, as it all comes back! I seem to have thought of it for the first time. And what a proof of its truth there is in our experience here! We shall reap as we have sown, and so much is sown which we cannot reap here— And if I should be doomed to spend eternity in asking whether I be really alive! No, no; God doesn't make a jest of us." He turned to Ford. "I am curious," he said, "to know how this strikes you, as you sit here in the full possession of your powers. I know very well, and you know, how men in their extremity are apt to turn back to the faith taught them at their mother's knees; and perhaps the common experience is repeating itself in my case. But you are in no such extremity. Does there seem to be any truth here?" He laid his hand on the book, and looked intently at Ford.

"It seems to be all the truth of the sort that there is."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Boynton.

"I express myself badly. But it's hard to express yourself well on this matter. I mean to say that whatever truth there was in that record has not been surpassed or superseded."

"And is that all you have to say?"

"That's all I could say till I had looked into the question. It seems to me that it is all any one could say."

"No doubt," said Boynton, with disappointment, "from your stand-point,—from the scientific stand-point. You say that there is nothing else, but you imply that this is not much."

"No," said Ford, "I think it's a great deal. I think it ought to be enough, if one cares"—

"That's the scientific attitude!" cried Boynton; "that's the curse of the scientific attitude! You do not deny, but you ask, 'What difference?'"

"At least," said Ford, with a smile, "you can let even such a poor representative of the scientific side as I am be glad that you see the fallacy of spiritualism."

"Oh, I don't pronounce it a fallacy," returned Boynton. "I only say that it has

proved fallacious in my hands, and that as long as it is used merely to establish the fact of a future life it will remain sterile. It will continue to be doubted, like a conjurer's trick, by all who have not seen it; and those who see it will afterwards come to discredit their own senses. The world has been mocked with something of the kind from the beginning; it's no new thing. Perhaps the hope of absolute assurance is given us only to be broken for our rebuke. Life is not so long at the longest that we need be impatient. If we wake, we shall know; if we do not wake, we shall not even know that we have not awakened." He added, "It is very curious, very strange, indeed, but the only thing that I have got by all this research is the one great thing which it never included,—which all research of the kind ignores."

Ford perceived that he wished him to ask what this was, and he said, "What is that?"

"God," replied Boynton. "It may be through an instinctive piety that we forbear to inquire concerning him of those earth-bound spirits. What could they know of him? Many pure and simple souls in this world must be infinitely nearer him. But out of all that chaos I have reached him.

No, I am not where I started: I have come in sight of him. I was anxious to know whether we should live hereafter; but whether we live or not, now I know that he lives, and he will take care. We need not be troubled. As for the dead, perhaps we shall go to them, but surely they shall not return to us. That seems true, doesn't it?"

"It 's all the truth there is," said Ford.

Boynton smiled. "You are an honest man. You won't say more than you think. I like you for that. I have a great wish to ask your forgiveness."

"My forgiveness? I have nothing to forgive!"

"Oh, yes. I involved you in the destiny of a mistaken and wilful man; I afflicted you with the superstitious manias of a lunatic who fancied that he was seeking the truth when he was only seeking himself. I have burdened you with a sense of my wish that you should stay here, because I still hoped to work out something to my own glory and advantage"—

"I never knew it; I can't think it," interrupted Ford. "It was my privilege to stay. These have been the best days of my life,—the happiest." He stopped; he believed that Boynton must know the meaning that rushed

from his heart into the words; but the old man evidently found only a conventional kindliness in them.

"Thank you," he said. "It is very strange to find you my friend after all, and to meet you on common ground,—I who have wandered so far round, and you who have continued forward with none of my aims. It would be interesting if a third could stand with us. I should like to see how far a minister of the gospel could come towards us. I should like to talk with a minister: not a theologian, but an ecclesiastic,—some one who embodied and represented the idea of a church."

"Do you mean a Catholic priest?" asked Ford.

"No, not that,—not just that; but still some one in whom the priestly character prevailed."

"I will be glad to gratify any wish you have in the matter, Dr. Boynton," said Ford. "I imagine it would be easy to get a clergyman to visit you from the village, and I 'll go to any one you want to see."

"Well, not now,—not now. Not to-day. Perhaps to-morrow. I should like to think it over first. I may have some new light by that time. I should like to look up some

other points, here. There is a text somewhere in Paul—it is a long time since I read it— Wait! 'We are saved by hope. But hope that is seen'—*that is seen*—'is *not* hope; for what a man seeth'— Very significant, very significant?" he added, more to himself than to Ford. "*Saved!* Really there seems to have been no question with them about the mere existence!" He lay quiet for a long time, with his hands folded behind his head, and a dreamy light was in his eyes. Ford heard the ticking of an insect in the wainscot. "Who is it," Boynton asked suddenly, "that speaks of the undiscovered country?"

"Hamlet," replied Ford.

"It might have been Job,—it might have been Ecclesiastes,—or David. 'The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns.' Is that it?"

"Yes. They commonly misquote it," added Ford mechanically.

"I know; they leave out *bourn*. They say, the undiscovered country whence no traveller returns. But it's the same thing. Yes; and Hamlet says no traveller returns, when he believes that he has just seen his father's spirit! The ghost that comes back to prove itself can't hold him to a belief in its

presence after the heated moment of vision is past! We *must* doubt it; we are better with no proof. Yes; yes! The undiscovered country—thank God, it can be what those babblers say! The undiscovered country—what a weight of doom is in the words—and hope!"

One of the sisters came in, and he seemed to forget Ford, who presently went away with an absent-minded salutation from him. Boynton had taken up the book, and while the sister propped his head with the pillows, he fluttered the leaves with impatient hands.

XXV.

AT the gate Ford turned towards Elihu's shop, intending to explain why he had not been able to speak of Egeria to her father. In his liberation from Boynton's appeals for sympathy, his thoughts thronged back to her; he framed a thousand happy phrases, in which he opened his heart, and she always answered as he wished. His face burned with the joyful shame of these thoughts, and he did not hear his name the first time it was called from a buggy standing at the office gate. The gay voices had hailed him a third time when he looked round, and slowly recognised Phillips and Mrs. Perham making frantic signs to him from the vehicle. They laughed at his stupefaction, and his sense of their intrusion mounted as he dragged himself across the street. Mrs. Perham leant out of the buggy and gave him her hand.

"*Well*, Mr. Ford! Is this the way you receive your friends? We have been chasing all over this outlandish place for you; we

have spent an hour with the sisters here, and have questioned them down to the quick, so that we know all about you; and we were just going to drive away in despair without seeing you."

"I 'm very unfortunate," said Ford.

"To be caught at the last moment? How *good* you always are! You don't know how I 've pined for your little speeches; they 're tonic. *Yes*, Mr. Ford!" she cried, with a daring laugh, "Mr. Perham is *very* well, for him,—I knew you were going to ask! —or I shouldn't be philandering about the country in this way." Ford glanced at Phillips, who trifled with the reins and looked sheepish.

"You should have gone over to Egerton before this, my dear fellow," he said. "There have been some charming people over there."

"*Have* been! His modesty," cried Mrs. Perham, "and my humility! *We* are at Egerton yet, Mr. Ford!"

"Oh, certainly. But Ford has us in Boston."

"Ah, very true," said Mrs. Perham. "There was quite a little buzz of excitement for a while, when Mr. Phillips first explained the romantic circumstances. The

young ladies drove over the next Sunday to Shaker meeting, on purpose to interview you, but they hadn't the courage. It was one of Mr. Perham's bad days, or I should have come, too; and we should have sent Mr. Phillips over long ago, if there had been any Mr. Phillips to send. But he 's only just got back to Egerton."

"Yes, my dear fellow, I carried out our little programme to the letter,—I wish I could say to the spirit; but your defection prevented. I found Butler at Egerton, and he jumped at the chance of driving on with me, in a manner that made your flattering consent seem nothing. We drove to Greenfield, and then followed up the valley of the Connecticut. It was indescribable, my dear friend. You have lost no end of material. I must really try to reproduce it for you some time. I thought of you often. I was always saying, 'Now, if Ford were here!' Two or three times I was actually on the point of writing to you. But you know how *that* is; you never wrote to *me*. I 'm very glad to hear from our sisters, here, that the old gentleman is better. Is he still in his craze?" Phillips spoke with anxious rapidity, and with a certain propitiation of manner; but Ford did not relax the dis-

pleasure of the looks with which he had heard of his explanation of the romantic circumstances.

"You ought to get something out of him; you ought to write him up; he'd make a capital paper," said Mrs. Perham. "I shall be on the look-out for him in your articles. And your Shaker experiences! The young ladies were sure you had turned Shaker, Mr. Ford, and they picked you out in the dance. We had *such* fun over it!" She continued, pulling down the corners of her mouth, "Oh, but we were all very *respectful*, Mr. Ford. We admired your self-devotion in staying here; especially, as you couldn't *esteem* them."

"I don't know what you mean," began Ford, with a sternness that would have silenced a less frivolous spirit.

"Why, haven't you *heard?*" cried Mrs. Perham, leaning forward, and dropping her tone confidentially, while Phillips made some inarticulate attempts to hinder her speaking. "The poor old gentleman was quite tipsy that morning when they stopped up there at that country hotel, and they had to be turned out-of-doors. Is it possible you haven't heard that?"

"Yes, I've heard that," said Ford.

"I always said," continued Mrs. Perham, "it was cruel to the girl; for she wasn't responsible for her father's habits, poor thing. Then of course you don't believe it?"

"No!"

"And you believe that all those manifestations took place there?"

"No!"

"An armed neutrality! Well, it's the only tenable position, and I shall take it myself in regard to the *other* affair. I never thought how convenient it must be."

Phillips found his voice: "Mrs. Perham, it's delightful chatting here; but I have to remind you that we shall be late for dinner if we stay any longer."

"Oh, that's true," admitted Mrs. Perham. "Good-bye, Mr. Ford. Do come over and see us, if you can tear yourself away from your protégés for a few hours. It's very strange, his lingering along so! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my dear friend!" said Phillips, trying to throw some exculpation into his afflicted face. "I am going back to Boston at the end of the week. Can I do anything for you there?" He did not wait for an answer, but lifted the reins and chirruped to his horse.

Ford caught the wheel in his hand, and

stopped it. "Hold on!" he said, quite white in the face. "What other affair, Mrs. Perham?"

"Other affair?" she repeated. "Oh! about the waterproof, you know."

"No, I don't know about the waterproof. What do you mean?"

"Is it possible the Shakers haven't told you? Perhaps they didn't think it worth mentioning. You know your friends — I forget the name; Boyntons?—had passed the night before they reached the Elm Tavern in a school-house up here; and the teacher found them there in the morning, and lent the young lady her waterproof. They were to send it back from Vardley Station; but as they never went to Vardley Station they naturally never sent it back."

"I don't believe it!" cried Ford.

"Mr. Phillips always told me you were a terrible sceptic!" said Mrs. Perham. "I merely had the story from the mother of the school-teacher, herself! We happened to stop at her house to ask the way, and when we inquired if the Boyntons were still here she came out with this story. She's a very voluble old lady. I dare say she tells it to every one. What is your theory about it?"

Ford released the wheel which he had been

gripping, and, giving it a contemptuous push, turned away without a word.

Mrs. Perham craned her head round to look back after him. "What a natural man!" she said, with sincere admiration. "He 's perfectly fascinating." She burst into a laugh. "Poor Mr. Phillips! He looked as if he wished you had been my authority."

Phillips shrugged his shoulders, and said drily, "I hope you are satisfied, Mrs. Perham."

"Why, no, I am not," she candidly owned, with a touch of real regret in her voice. "I only meant to tease him; but if he 's in love with her, I suppose he 'll take it to heart."

"In love with whom?" asked Phillips.

"Sister Diantha."

Phillips stared at her.

"Well, with this medium, then,—this Medea, Ashtaroth, Egeria,—*I* don't know what her name is." As Phillips continued to stare at her, Mrs. Perham gave a shriller laugh. "Really, *you* are a man, too. I shall never dare take on such easy terms with you again, Mr. Phillips,—never! I don't wonder men can't understand women: they don't understand their own simple sex. Of *course* he 's in love with her, and must have been from the first."

"Well, then, allow me to say, Mrs. Perham, that if you think he 's in love with Miss Boynton I don't quite see what your object was. I felt that it was an intrusion to come over here, at the best."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Phillips!"

"And it appears to me that it was extraneous to repeat those stories to him."

"Extraneous is good! And you have an ally in my own conscience, Mr. Phillips. I wanted to see a natural man under the influence of a strong emotion, and I don't like it, I think. I didn't suppose he was so serious about her. But I don't believe any harm 's done. He won't give her up on account of what I 've said; and if he does perhaps she ought to be given up." Phillips dealt the horse a cut of the whip, and left the talk to Mrs. Perham, as they drove away.

In the dull first half-hour after dinner, while she sat absently feeling on the porcelain-toned piano in the hotel parlour for the music of the past, two ladies who wished to see her were announced. One of these visitors proved to be a Shaker sister, whom Mrs. Perham recognised, and who introduced her companion, a short, squarely built young woman, as Miss Thorn.

They took seats, though Mrs. Perham had

risen and remained standing, and Miss Thorn said without preamble, "I teach in the school-house in Vardley, where Dr. Boynton stopped this spring. I heard from my mother this noon that a lady and gentleman had been asking the way to the Shaker village, who seemed to know Dr. Boynton."

"No, I don't know him," said Mrs. Perham.

Phillips came forward, from a corner of the parlour. "I know Dr. Boynton; at least I saw him and Miss Boynton in Boston once."

"I thought," said Miss Thorn, "that I ought to come and tell you that my mother didn't understand about that—that waterproof."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Perham; "we thought it so curious."

"I was sure," said Phillips, with an attempted severity, "that there was some mistake." The severity had no apparent effect upon Mrs. Perham, but Miss Thorn, who had been talking in some sort to both, now addressed herself wholly to him:—

"I was away from home when you stopped to-day. I thought you would like to know there was a misunderstanding. The waterproof was as much a gift as anything; though that wouldn't have excused them if they

had thought I wanted it again. But anybody could see that Miss Boynton was stupid then with the fever, and didn't half know where she was or what she was doing. She had been walking late the night before through the snow, and they had slept on the benches before the stove." Phillips bowed, and looked at Miss Thorn, who resumed with increasing stiffness: "I never wondered at *his* not remembering it; he seemed too flighty for anything. I knew they were here all summer at the Shakers'. I don't," said Miss Thorn, "pass any judgment on my mother for the way she looked at it; but I'd have given anything if she hadn't spoken." The tears started to her eyes, and she bit her lip as she rose.

"It didn't make any difference to us," said Diantha, who had hitherto sat a silent and inscrutable glimmer of spectacles in the depths of her Shaker bonnet. "It got hung up among our things while she was sick, and when she got well she couldn't seem to remember about it. She thought she must have brought it from the cars with her for her own."

Miss Thorn waited, and then resumed stiffly, "I never suspected or blamed them the least bit. As soon as I could, I went

over to the Shakers' to see about it, and told them the way I felt, and that I wanted to come to you. Diantha felt as if she would like to come with me, and I brought her. That's all." Miss Thorn rose with a personal primness that by contrast almost softened the Shaker primness of Diantha into ceremony

Phillips experienced the rush of an emotion which, upon subsequent analysis, he knew to be of unquestionable genuineness. "My dear young lady," he said, "I ask you to do me the justice to believe that I never had an injurious suspicion of Miss Boynton. Her father had attempted a line of life that naturally subjected himself and her to question, but I never doubted them. I have a positive pleasure in disbelieving anything to their disadvantage in connection with — with — your generous behaviour to them. Did—did Mr. Ford speak of the matter to you? Did he wish any expression from me in their behalf? Because"—

"He no need to ask anything as far as *we're* concerned," interposed Diantha.

"No," said Phillips. "I can only repeat that I was sure there was a misunderstanding, and that you 've done us a favour in coming. Is there any way in which I could be of use

to Dr. Boynton? I should be most happy if I thought there was."

Miss Thorn left the reply to Diantha, who said as they went out, "There ain't anything as I know of."

"Really," commented Mrs. Perham, "this is edifying. I haven't felt so put down for a *long* while. I don't see what more we could do, unless we joined with Miss Thorn and Sister Diantha in presenting Miss Boynton with a piece of plate, as a slight token of gratitude for her noble example in borrowing a waterproof and keeping it. She has classed the waterproof with the umbrella, as a thing not to be returned. Is that the principle? Well, if Mr. Ford is going to marry her"—

"Going to marry her . cried Phillips.

"Why, of course. Did you think anything else? Is marriage such an unnatural thing?"

"No. But Ford's marrying is."

"That remains to be seen. If he 's going to marry her, he can't believe in her too thoroughly. I've an idea that the Pythoness is insipid; but if Mr. Ford likes insipidity, I want him to have it. I think we ought to drive over to the Shakers', and assure him in person that we didn't believe anything, and

we didn't mean anything. You shall do all the talking this time; you talk so well."

"Thanks," said Phillips, "I suspect I've done my last talking to Ford."

"And you won't go?" demanded Mrs. Perham, with a laugh. "Then I must go alone, some day. Meantime, I know how to keep a secret. I hope Miss Thorn may be able to teach her mother."

XXVI.

FORD stood still, looking at the ground, while Phillips and Mrs. Perham drove away. His impulse to pluck Phillips from his place, and make him pay in person for that woman's malice, was still so vividly present in his nerves that he seemed to have done it; but when the misery of Phillips's face, intensifying as Mrs. Perham went on from bad to worse, recurred to him, he broke into a laugh.

Sister Frances came out of the office. "Friend Edward," she said, "was that wicked woman speakin' to you about Egery?"

"Yes."

"Don't you believe her! Don't you believe a word she said!" cried the Shakeress, with hot looks of indignation. "I know just how it all happened"—

"I don't wish to know. I should feel disgraced if I let you tell me. Whatever happened, this woman lied. Where is Egeria?"

"Oh!" cried Frances, "she has gone to Harshire with Rebecca. She won't be back till mornin'." She bent on the young man a look of wistful sympathy.

"Well!" he cried, throwing up his hands desperately, as if the morrow were a time so remote that it never would come, "I must wait."

"She 'd been plannin' to go a long while," Frances apologised, "and her father seemed so well this mornin' she thought she might"—

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered Ford dejectedly. He knew that he somehow had driven her away by his behaviour of the day before, and that he had himself to blame for this delay in which he stifled. He turned about, with some wild purpose of following her to Harshire, and speaking to her there, when he heard Frances calling him again:—

"Friend Edward, I don't know as you know that Egery's expectin' friends tomorrow."

"Friends? No, what friends?" asked Ford. "Has she gone to meet them at Harshire?" he added stupidly.

"Well, no; she only got the letter yesterday. I suppose her father didn't think to tell you of it. I don't know as you ever

heard her speak of the young man that come with 'em as far as the Junction that day they missed their train. He was with 'em a while in Boston, and he come from the same place they did, down East. He 's been twice to find 'em there in Maine this summer, but he couldn't hear any word of 'em till just now. They was children together, Egery and Friend— Well, I never *could* remember names."

"Oh, never mind!" exclaimed Ford, with a deathly pallor. "I know the name,—I know the man!" And now he turned again, and hurried beyond a second recall from the trouble in which Frances saw him groping down the road, like one in the dark. When he had got out of her sight, he walked a little into the wayside woods, and stumbling to the ground gave himself to the despair which had blackened round him. His first feeling was a generous regret that now he could not let his love speak the contempt in which he held the wrong he had heard done her; this feeling came even before the sense of hopeless loss to which he abandoned himself with a lover's rashness. He meekly owned that the man whom he marvelled now that he could ever have forgotten as a rival was one of those in whom women confided, and were

not disappointed, — who made constant friends and good husbands; and questioning himself he could not be sure that her happiness would be as safe in his own keeping. He remembered with abject humiliation the last time he had met this man, and the savagery with which he had wreaked upon him the jealousy which he would not then admit to himself, and in which he had refused to consider even her at his prayer. The turmoil went on for hours, but always to this effect. The most that he could hope, when he crept homeward at dusk, sore as if bruised in body by the conflict in his mind, was that he might steal away before he saw them together. With this intent, to which he had worked with difficulty in the chaos of his dreams, he set about putting his books and other belongings together, but he gave up tremulous and exhausted before the work was half done. He fell to thinking again, and this time with a sort of sullen resentment, in which he said to himself that his love had its own rights, and that he would not betray them. It had a right to be heard, at any cost; and he began to despise his purpose of hurrying away as mock-heroic. It was like a character in a lady's novel to leave the field to a rival whom he

did not yet know to be preferred; the high humility, in which he had thought to yield Egeria without her explicit authority to a man whom he judged his better, sickened him. He saw that it was for her to choose between them, and it was the part of a coward and a fool to go before she had chosen. As matters stood, he had no right to go; she had a pre-eminent right to know from him that he loved her.

He hungrily despatched the supper he had left standing on his table, and then kindled a brush-wood fire on his hearth; he sat down before it in his easy-chair, and, stayed by the clearer mind at which he had arrived, he experienced a sensual comfort in the blaze. Presently he was aware of drowsing; and then suddenly he awoke. The dawn came in at the windows; he perceived that he had passed the night in his chair. A loud knocking continued at his door, while he gathered his scattered wits together. At length he cried, "Come in!" and the farmer from over the way entered.

"I don't suppose ye know what's happened?" he said.

"No," said Ford, "I don't, if it's anything in particular."

"No. Well, I thought may be ye'd like

to know. The old man 's dead. Died sudden this mornin'."

"What? Who? What old man?"

The farmer nodded his head in the direction of the village. "Dr. Boynton. I thought ye 'd like to know it."

"Thank you," said Ford. He rose and stood at one corner of the hearth; the farmer, from the other, stiffly stretched his hard, knotted hand towards the ashes of the dead fire.

Ford went out and walked up through the village, whose familiar aspect was all estranged, as if he himself had died, and were looking upon it from another world. At the office he found a group of Shakers listening to Boynton's physician, who on his appearance, addressed more directly to him what he was saying of the painless death Boynton must have died in his sleep. "The first part of the night he was very restless, and several times he said that he would like to see you and talk with you; but he would not let them send; said he hadn't formulated his ideas yet." The doctor involuntarily smiled in recalling a turn of the phraseology so newly silent for ever. "I wonder if he has formulated them now to his satisfaction." Ford made no response, and the doctor asked,

"Did he speak to you yesterday of the case of an electrical girl?"

"Yes."

"I inferred as much from something he said, when I saw him in the afternoon. I had lent him the magazine containing the account. He found an analogy between that case and Miss Boynton's that I had not anticipated. It seems to have put a quietus to his belief in her supernatural gifts."

"Yes," Ford assented, as before.

"He told me that it had depressed him to the lowest point. But when I saw him he had quite recovered his spirits." He added thoughtfully, "You can't say that a man dies because he wishes to die; though it sometimes seems as if people could live if they would. When I parted with Dr. Boynton he had what I might call an enthusiasm for death. It might be described in other words as a desire, amounting almost to frenzy, to know whether we live again, and a willingness to gratify that desire at the cost of not living at all."

"He dwelt habitually on that question," said Ford, with difficulty. "But when I talked with him yesterday, he seemed at rest on the main point."

"Yes, I don't know but he was. Perhaps

I had better say that he was impatient to verify it. He talked of nothing else during the evening, Sister Frances tells me; though he fell off quietly to sleep at last."

"Well," said Ford drearily, "he *has* verified it now."

"Yes, and in the old way,—the way appointed for all living. He knows now. Did it ever occur to you, sir," added the doctor, philosophically, "what ignorance all our wisdom is compared with the knowledge of a child that has just died?"

"If it knows anything at all."

"Oh, certainly,—if it *does* know."

"We are *sure* it knows," said Elihu.

They walked out together, and before the doctor mounted his buggy to drive away they stood a moment looking at the closed windows of the infirmary. "It's useless, now, to talk of causes," said the doctor. "The heart had been affected a long time"—

"He is dead, all the same," said Ford.

"Oh, yes, he is *dead*," assented the doctor. "What I meant to say was that while no human foresight could have prevented the result, I confess its suddenness surprised me. One moment he was with us, and the next"—

"He wasn't," interrupted Ford, restively.

"That's all we can know: and neither he nor all the myriads that have gone that way can tell us anything more."

"If we suppose him to be somewhere in a state of conscious being," observed the doctor, "we can suppose that reflection to be a trial to him, after a life so much devoted to the effort of working out proof of something different."

"He had been a spiritualist; and not a selfish or ignoble one," answered Ford, oppressed by the doctor's speculative mood, and letting his impatience appear. A voice was in his ears, repeating the things that Boynton had said. In the pauses of it, he brooded upon the chances that had thrown upon him for sympathy and comfort in his last days the man for whom he had once felt and shown such contempt. The dark irony, the broken meaning, afflicted him, and he lurked about, stunned and helpless, waiting till Egeria should come, and dreading to see the grief in which he had no rights. He thought of her trouble, not of his own; it blotted even his jealousy from his mind, and left him acquiescent in whatever fate befell. The time for what he had intended to do was swept away; he could now only wait passively for events to shape themselves.

Hatch did not come that day, and Ford took such part as Elihu assigned him in the sad business of fulfilling Boynton's wishes. These had been casually expressed from time to time to Frances, and referred to his removal to his old home, where he desired to be laid by the side of his wife. When Hatch arrived, the second morning, he assumed charge of the affair, as a family friend; and Ford, lapsing from all active concern in it, shut himself in his own room, and waited for he knew not what. In the evening Hatch came to see him. They had already met in the presence of the Shakers, but doubtless neither felt that they had met till now, since their parting in Boston. Hatch received awkwardly the civility which Ford awkwardly showed. He would not sit down, and he said abruptly that he had come to say that Miss Boynton was going back in the morning to her home in Maine, where the funeral was to be. He added that Frances and Elihu were going with her, on the part of the family; and after a hesitation he said, "Wouldn't you like to attend the funeral too?"

"Has she authorised you to invite me?" asked Ford.

"Well, no," said Hatch. "I don't sup-

pose she wanted to put that much of a burden on you. It 's a long ways."

Ford reflected a long time. "You are going, I suppose?"

"Why, of course," said Hatch.

Ford pondered again. "Under the circumstances," he said, "I believe that I oughtn't to let my own preference have any weight. Miss Boynton is going with friends to her own home, and I couldn't be of any use. I propose to do what I think would be least afflicting to her by not going." He hesitated, and presently added, tentatively, "I believe she would prefer it."

"You ought to know best," said Hatch.

"Well, I believe that I am right. Tell her that I will not try to see her before she goes; but — but — some other time." He said this tentatively also, and with an odd sort of faltering, as if somehow Hatch might advise him better. "I thank you for coming."

"Well, sir," said the young fellow, standing with his feet squarely apart in the way that Ford had hated him for in Mrs. Le Roy's parlour, "you must do what you think is best. *I* want to thank *you* too. Dr. Boynton was a good friend to me, and from all I hear you were a good friend to him,—at last.

You 've behaved like a man. They all say here that the doctor couldn't have got along without you."

"They overpraise me," said Ford, helped to a melancholy irony by Hatch's simple patronage.

"No, sir," replied Hatch, "I don't think so. And you must have found it pretty tough, feeling the way you did about him."

"No," said Ford, "it was not so tough as it might seem. I liked him. It isn't a logical position; he never squared with my ideas; but I know now that he was a singularly upright and truthful man."

"That 's so, every time," said Hatch.

"I don't care for my consistency in the thing; I 'd rather do him justice. I 've come to his own ground, and yours: I want to say that when I interfered with him there in Boston he had a noble motive, and I had an ignoble one."

"If you 're not firing over my head," said Hatch, "and if I catch your meaning rightly, I 'm bound to confess that the doctor had got mixed up with a pretty queer lot in the course of his researches. But he was all right himself. I pinned my faith to him, right along. But if you mean that you 're going in for anything like spiritual-

ism, I advise you to hush it up among yourself. As far as I 'm concerned, I 've about come to that conclusion. And I think Miss Egeria 's had enough of it."

His mention of her name in this connection was at first puzzling, and at last so offensive to Ford that he found it harder than he had thought to say what he now said. After a dry assent to Hatch's proposition, he added, "I dare say you 're right. Mr. Hatch, I treated you shabbily when we met last. I am sorry for that, and ashamed of it. I should have behaved better if I had understood better"—

"Oh, I knew how it was myself," Hatch interrupted. "Or I did when I came to think of it." Ford looked at him as if he did not comprehend his drift; and Hatch continued, "It was pretty rough at the time, but I suppose I should have acted just so in your place. Well, sir! I hope we part better friends, now," he said, offering his hand. "I think that 's what the old doctor would have liked. Some of his ideas were most too large a fit for this world, but he was pretty practical about others."

Ford took the proffered hand, and followed Hatch to his door, wholly baffled and unsettled. He longed to have it all out with him,

but this was not possible, and he submitted as he best could. He had thought himself right in resolving not to follow Egeria home, or vex her with his presence before she went; but he was not sure of this now; and he spent the time intervening before her departure in an anguish of indecision. But he let her go without seeing her, and in the afternoon he went away too.

XXVII.

HE did not go back to his old lodging in Boston, but spent a day at a hotel till he could find other quarters. It was intolerable to think of meeting any one he knew, and he had such a horror of Mrs. Perham's possible return that he asked at the door whether she had come back before he went in to make ready for removal.

When the change was effected, all change seemed for ever at an end. The days went by without event; he could not write, but he took up again his study with the practical chemist, and pushed on with that through an unstoried month which brought him through the bluster and chill of September to the mellow heart of October.

A chasm divided him from all that he had been, and he tried to keep from thinking across it. But his mind was full of broken glimpses of the past; of doubts of what he had done; of vague wonder if he should ever hear from her again, and how; of crazy purposes, broken as fast as formed, of going

where he might look on her, if it might be only that, and know that she was still in life. There were terrible moments in which his heart was wrung with the possibility that his conjecture had been all wrong, and that she might be lingering in cruel amaze that he had never made any sign to her, and puzzling over the problem which his refusal to see her, or to stand with her at her father's grave, had left her.

One evening when he came home, he found a flat, square package, which had arrived through the mail after going first to his old address. It was directed in an old-fashioned, round hand, and it yielded softly to the touch with which he fingered it before he tore it open. It proved to hold a handkerchief, which he recognised as his own, fragrantly washed and ironed; and he found a little note pinned to it, and signed F. Plumb, explaining that the handkerchief had been found in his room. While he stood scowling at it, and trying to make out who F. Plumb was, and where he had left the handkerchief, he turned the scrap of paper over, and saw written in pencil on the back, as if the writer had wished to whisper it there, "I do not know as you heard that Egeria is back with us. Frances."

Now he knew, now he understood. All the hopes that had seemed dead sprang to life again.

He caught up a paper, and looked at the time-tables. The last train passing Vardley would leave in fifteen minutes. He turned the key in his door, and two hours later he was rounding the dark point of the wooded hill that intervenes between the station and the Shaker village, where a light sparely twinkled in the window of Elihu's shop. He had walked, as he supposed, but his pace was more like a run from the train ; and his heart thundered in his ears as he sat and panted on Elihu's door-step, trying to gather courage to go in. At last he went in without the courage.

Elihu was amazed, certainly, but hardly disquieted. He shut upon his thumb the book that he was reading, and pushed his spectacles above his forehead. "Friend Ford!" he said.

"Yes!" answered the young man, still striving for breath, as he pressed the Shaker's hand. "I have come—I have come"—

"Yee," Elihu assented ; "sit down. We did not expect you, but the family will be glad to see you. Have you kept your health?"

"Is she well? Is she going to stay with you? When did she come back?" The questions thronged upon one another faster than he could utter them, and he stopped perforce again.

"I suppose you mean Egeria. Yee, she is well. She came back last week. I—I—wrote to you from her place that she was coming back." Elihu coloured with a guilty conscience.

"I never got your letter. I only heard two hours ago that she was with you."

"She only stayed to settle up things there. I don't know as Humphrey ever told you that her grandfather left his property to her?"

"I don't know— Yes, yes,—he did."

"There weren't any of her folks left there, and her father had brought her up in such a way, late years, that she was pretty much a stranger outside of her grandfather's house. When she got back there, she found that it was more like home to her here than anywhere else. Friend Hatch stayed a spell, to help her settle up the property, and then he had to go West again. As soon as she could she came to us."

"Elihu," said Ford, who had listened with but half a sense, "I have come here to speak

to her. Shall I do it? I want you to advise me. I want you to tell me"–

"Nay, I must not meddle or make in this business," said the Shaker.

"You *did* meddle and make in it once," retorted Ford, unresentfully but inflexibly, "and I recognised your right to do so, from your point of view; I submitted to you. We can't withdraw from each other's confidence now. I have a claim upon your advice. Besides, in all worldly knowledge that comes through acquaintance with women, I am as much a Shaker as you are. I only know that I must speak with her. If she cares anything for me, as you said she did, I must speak. But when? Shall I go away again, and come back after a while? Since we last talked together have you learned anything that makes you think she would be willing to spend her life among you? If you have, I will leave her alone. She could be at peace here; and I,—I have only brought her trouble and sorrow so far. Even if she cared for me, I would leave her to you— No, I *wouldn't!* I couldn't do that! By all that a man can be to a woman, I oughtn't to do it! But what do you say?"

Elihu had tilted his chair up on its hind-legs, and he rocked back and forth without

bringing its fore-legs to the ground. "I haven't seen anything in her that would make me think she would like to stay with us. And I *have* heard that she intends to leave us as soon as she can find something to do in the world outside. Frances wants she should go to friends of hers in Boston that would help her find something. They 've been talking about it this afternoon, and Egeria's mind seems quite made up about going."

"Well," repeated Ford, "may I speak with her?"

"I can't answer you. I felt it a cross laid upon me to interfere against your showing your feeling for her here; but to interfere in behalf of it is a cross which I don't have any call to take up—twice."

"Can I stay here to-night?" asked Ford.

"Yee. They can give you a room at the office."

"Do you suppose Mrs. Williams could put me up some sort of bed in my old place? I would rather sleep there."

"Oh, yee, I guess so. I will step down with you and see."

"No, I'll go alone. If she can't, I'll come back to the office. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Elihu, with his flicker of a smile.

Ford's bed had not been taken down, and while the farmer's wife made it ready for him with fresh sheets, he kindled a roaring fire on his hearth. He sat a long time before it, turning over and over in his mind the same doubt which had tormented him when he last sat there. But he could not believe that Frances and Elihu would have let him come back if there had been any grounds for this fear. It had burnt in his heart to ask Elihu, and solve it; but that seemed a sort of cowardice, and he had withheld the question. He would not know the truth now till he had put his own fate to the test, and spoken in defiance of whatever the answer might be.

The next morning he perceived an undercurrent of deeply subdued excitement in such of the family as he met at the office, and a sympathy which he afterwards remembered with compassion. The brothers and sisters all shook hands with him, and, refraining from recognition of the suddenness of his return, said they were glad to see him back. "And that 's more than we can say to *some* of the friends from the world outside!" exclaimed Diantha, when her turn came. Ford was touched by this friendliness; a man so little

used to being liked might overvalue it; but he looked impatiently about for Frances, and the sisters knew how to interpret his glance.

"She 's gone over to put the infirmary to rights a little," Rebecca explained. She added casually, "Egery 's over there with her, I guess. She wanted to go."

The sisters decently turned from the door, but they stood a little way back from the window, and looked at him there as he crossed the street.

The door of the little house stood open, and Ford saw Frances within, dusting where there was no dust, and vainly rubbing the neat chairs with a cloth. The bed where Boynton had lain was dismantled: it seemed as if he might have risen to have it made for him. Ford expected to hear his voice, and a lump hung in his throat. When his sad eyes met those of Frances, he saw that hers were red with weeping. She gave her hand and said, "Good-morning, Friend Edward. I 'm *real* glad to see you back again. We 've all missed you. I was just thinkin' how you and Friend Boynton seemed to have been with us always. He went to a better place; but where did you go? Do you think the world outside is better? I wish you could feel to stay with us, Edward!"

"It isn't possible," said Ford, smiling sadly. "The only point on which I should agree with you is that the world outside is not so good a place."

"Well, that 's a great deal."

"It isn't enough."

"Really," said Frances, "it 's discouragin' to hear you and Egery go on. You say every thing that 's good of the Shakers, but you won't be gathered in."

"I *think* everything that 's good of you. I honour and reverence you; I do everything but envy you. It 's another world that calls me."

"Yee," sighed the Shakeress, "that 's just the way with Egery. I suppose I have been here so long that I don't see anything strange in Shakers. The other people are the ones that are strange to me. But I can't see 't it 's different with Egery. She 's had so much queerness in her life already 't I guess she don't want to have *much* more. Was you surprised to hear 't she 'd got back?"

"I was very glad; and I 'm very grateful to you, Frances"—

"I *s'posed* the handkerchief must be yours," Frances interrupted, with artful evasion. She went on to give some particulars of Boynton's funeral and of their sojourn

in Egeria's old home and of her affairs. "It was *real* kind and good of Friend Hatch to stay as long as he did, and help her, especially as they *do* say he 's engaged to be married out West there." Something like a luminous concussion seemed to take place in Ford's brain. The burden suddenly thrown from his soul left him light and giddy, and he clung for support to the door-post, while Frances prattled on: "Well, Humphrey says he 's a master-hand for business, and he 's sure to get along. He 's been a good friend to Egery, all through, and her father before her. I guess if Friend Boynton had taken *his* advice, there wouldn't been so much sufferin' for her. Well, she 's back with us again. But it 's only till she can find something for herself in the world outside. I suppose it 's natural for her to want to be like folks. That 's the way I look at it."

Ford's heart throbbed. "Do you think I 'm like folks, Frances?"

"Not much," replied Frances.

"Do you think I could be,—for her sake?"

A flash of joy, succeeded by a red blush, went over the pale face of the Shakeress. "You 'd *oughtn't* to talk to me of such things, Edward. You know it ain't right."

"I know—I know," pleaded the young man. "I know it's all wrong. But—but I knew you knew about it, and I thought—I thought"—

"She's up in the orchard, by her apple-tree!" cried Frances, with hysterical abruptness. "Don't you say another word to me!" But after Ford left the room, she ran to the door, and watched him going up the orchard aisle.

Egeria stood leaning against the tree, and looking another way, and she might well have been ignorant of his approach through the fallen grass, till she heard his husky voice:—

"I—I have come back— I would have come before, but I didn't know you were here"— He had some intention of excusing himself, because in his cogitations it had occurred to him that she must have wondered why he had not come. But she only turned on him that face of intense resistance, changing to question, and then to wild appeal. "For Heaven's sake," he exclaimed, "don't look at me in that way! What is the matter?"

"Oh, *why* did you come back?" she cried. "Why couldn't you have stayed away, and left me in peace?"

He stood motionless, while his hopes seemed to fall in a tangible ruin round him. He saw now how eagerly he had built them on the fears of those fantastic communists, and how fondly he had hidden from himself all the reasons against them. He could have laughed at the ghastly wreck, but that he was too sick at heart. He moved his feet heavily, as if the long grass were fetters about them, and he tried to go; but without some other word he could not. "Well," he said, at last, "if you ask me, I can't tell you. I can go away again, and not molest you any more. Only, before I go, tell me—you've not told me yet—that you forgive me, Egeria." Her whispered name had been so often on his lips that he now spoke it aloud for the first time without knowing it. "Since your father is gone, I must be more hateful to you than ever. But I am going out of your way now; try to forgive me and to tell me so! Let me have your pardon to take with me." She broke into a low sound of weeping, while he waited for her response. "Well, I will go. It's best for me to know finally that, although you have tolerated me here, at the bottom of your heart you have always abhorred me."

"No, no! I didn't say that."

"Not in words,—no."

"But if you made me say that I forgave you"—

"Make you say it? Nothing under heaven could make you say it! What is it you mean?"

She looked up, and ran her eye in piteous search over his face.

"When you first came there, in Boston, and when you hurt me; when we went after the leaves, and I forgot him; when I talked with you in the garden, and blamed him; when I went with you into the woods, and neglected him, almost the last day he lived—Oh, even if I couldn't, I ought to hate you! Did you expect— Yes, I *will*,—I will never let you go, now, till you tell me whether it was true. He is gone, and I have no one to help me. I shall have to do for myself; but whatever my life is to be, I am going to have it my own; and it isn't mine if that is true."

"If that is true?" repeated Ford, in stupefaction. "If what is true?"

But the impulse which had carried her to this point failed her, apparently, and left her terrified at her own daring. She cowered at the involuntary step he made toward her, as a bird stoops for flight. "If what is true?" he reiterated. "Tell me what you mean!"

He wondered if perhaps some rumour of his talk with Elihu had come to her, and she had wished to punish his presumption in trusting the Shaker's conjecture regarding her; if she were resolved to wreak upon him her maidenly indignation at the community's meddling. It seemed out of keeping with her and all the circumstances; but he could think of nothing else, and he darkly approached it: "If you have heard anything here that makes you think that I have come to you in anything but the humblest, the most reverent spirit, I beseech you not to believe it! Has Elihu—or Frances— Is it something they have said?"

"No," she said, and still shrunk away, as if he might be able to force the truth from her.

"Then what is it? Surely you won't leave me in this perplexity? If there is anything that I can do or undo"—

"No! Oh, go, for pity's sake!"

"I can't go now," said the young man. "I won't go till you have told me what you mean. You must tell me."

She cast a strange glance at him. "If you make me tell you, that would show that it was true; and he was right when he used to say— I don't want to believe it! Go,

and let me try to think that you came here by chance, and that you stayed for his sake. Indeed, indeed, I can get to thinking again that you never tried to influence me in that way!"

"In what way?" he asked, but now a gleam of light, lurid enough, began to steal upon his confusion. Her alternate eagerness and reluctance to be with him; her broken questions, the gestures, the looks, the tones, that had crossed with mystery the happiness he had known with her in the last weeks before her father's death, and made it at its sweetest fearful and insecure, recurred to him with new meaning, and a profound compassion qualified his despair, and made him gentle and patient. "Is it possible," he asked, "that you mean that old delusion of your father's about me! And could you believe that I would try to control you against your will—to use some unnatural power over you? Ah!" he cried, "I couldn't take even your forgiveness, now; for you might think that I had extorted it!" He looked sadly at her, but she did not speak, and he had a struggle to keep his pity of her from turning to execration of the unhappy man whose error could thus rise from his grave to cloud her soul; but he ruled

himself,—not without an ominous remembrance of his former attempts to separate her cause from her father's,—and brokenly continued: "Well, I have deserved that, too. But I know that before he died your father came to a clearer mind about those things, and I believe that now, wherever he is, nothing could grieve him more than to know that he had left you in that hideous superstition." He looked with grave tenderness at her hidden face. "How could you think"—and now his tone expressed his wounded self-respect as well as his sorrow for her—"that I could be so false to both of us?"

"I didn't always think," she whispered. "I—I was afraid"—

"But what made you afraid that such a thing could be? I am a brute,—I know that; I gave you early proof of that,—but I hoped there was nothing covert in me."

"You said once that people influenced others without knowing it; and once—that night when we came from the woods—you said it was a spell that made me lose the way, and wouldn't let me blame you"—

"And you really had those black doubts of me in your heart? I thought you were suffering me here because you were good

and merciful, and you were always watching me to find out whether I was not using some vile magic against you."

"No, no! Not always," she protested, lifting her face. "Did I say that?"

"No, you didn't say it! Well, you had the right to hurt me in any way you could; and I give you the satisfaction of knowing that nothing could hurt me worse than this."

"Oh, I didn't mean to wound you! Don't think that! And I forgave you; yes, I did forgive you! I *never* hated you—not even that morning there by the fountain when I thought you had hurt him. And when you said I ought, it made me wonder if what he used to say— And then I couldn't get it out of my mind! But I never meant to tell you by a single word or look, if it killed me."

"I believe you. It was something not to be spoken. I think now I can go without your pardon. It seems to me that we are quits."

Once more he turned to go, but she implored, all her face red with generous remorse, "Oh, not till you 've forgiven *me!* I never thought how it would seem to you. Indeed I never did!"

He smiled sadly. "Forgive *you?* Oh, that 's easy. But even if it were very hard, I could do it. I can see how it has been

with you from the first, and how, with what you had been taught to think of me by your father,—I don't blame him for it; he was as helpless as you were,—you perverted my careless words and gave them a sinister meaning that I never dreamt of. But what can I do, or say, to leave you with better thoughts of me?"

"I could see that you were kind and good even when I was the most afraid," she murmured. "But after the way we had begun together, and all that you had done to us, —and said to him,—sometimes I couldn't understand why you were here, or why you stayed, and then"—

"I don't wonder! I hadn't given you cause to expect any good of me; and if I were to tell you why I stayed, as I once hoped I might, I couldn't make it appear an unselfish reason. Oh, my dearest!" he cried, "I loved you so that I couldn't have taken your love itself against your will! Ever since I first saw you, and all the time that I had lost you, my whole life was for you; and when I found you again how could I help staying till you drove me from you? Good-bye, and if any thought of yours has injured me, let me set it against my telling you this now." She had slowly averted her

face; she did not shrink from him, but she did not return his good-bye, and he waited in vain for her to speak. Then, "Shall I go?" he asked in foolish anti-climax.

"No"—

The blood rioted in his heart. "And do you still believe that of me?"

"I believe—what you say," she whispered.

"But why do you believe me? Do I make you do it?"

"I don't know—yes, something makes me."

"Against your will?"

"I can't tell."

"Do you think it is a spell, now?"

"I don't know."

"And are you afraid of it?"

"No"—

"What is it, Egeria?" he cried, and in the beseeching look which she lifted to his, their eyes tenderly met. "Oh, my darling! Was *this* the spell"—

The rapture choked him; he caught her hand and drew her towards him.

But at this bold action, Sister Frances, who had not ceased to watch them, threw her apron over her head.

XXVIII.

THE powers of the family were heavily taxed by the consideration of a case without precedent in its annals. On the report of Sister Frances and the subsequent knowledge of Elihu, it became necessary to act at once. Probably no affair of such delicate importance had ever presented itself to a society vowed to celibacy as the fact of a courtship and proposal of marriage which had taken place with their privity, and with circumstances so peculiar that they could not wholly feel that they had withheld their approval.

"What I look at, Elihu," said Frances, "is this: that we can't any of us say but what it 's the best thing that can happen to Egery, so long as she ain't going to be gathered in. And what I want to know is, whether we 've got to turn our backs on her because she 's doin' the best she can, or whether we 're goin' to show out that we feel to rejoice with her."

"Nay, we can't do that," replied Elihu,

in sore embarrassment. "There are no two ways about it but what our natural feelings do go with her,—to some extent. I 'm free to confess that when Friend Ford came and told me just now I felt"— Elihu apparently found himself not so free to confess after all. He stopped abruptly, and added, "But that 's neither here nor there. What we 've got to do now is not to withhold our sympathy from these young people who are doing right in their order, and at the same time not to relax our opposition to the principle."

"Love the sinner and condemn the sin," suggested Laban.

"Nay," replied Elihu, rejecting the phraseology rather than the idea, "not exactly that."

"I can't understand," interposed Rebecca, with her sex's abhorrence of an abstraction, "where and how they 're goin' to get married. There ain't any Shaker way of marryin', and I don't know what we *should* do with our young folks if they got married here. I don't suppose we should have one of 'em left by spring."

"Nay," said Elihu, "we might as well give up at once." He rocked himself vigorously to and fro; but his hardening face did not lose its anxious expression.

"Where *will* they get married?" asked Rebecca. "She hasn't got anywheres to go. Her own folks are all dead at home, and she hasn't *got* any home."

"I don't know. They can't get married here," returned Elihu.

"They can't go right off to a minister and get married now, so soon after her father's death. And besides, she ain't ready. She hasn't got anything made up."

The question of clothes agitated even these unworldly women, and they debated and deplored Egeria's unprepared condition, urging that she must have this, and could not do without that, till Elihu could bear it no longer. "I feel," he cried, "that it is unseemly for us to consider these things! It identifies us practically with a state which we only tolerate as part of the earthly order. We must not have anything to do with it from this time forth."

"Well, Elihu, what shall we do?" demanded Diantha. "We might send *him* away, but we can't turn *her* out-of-doors. Do you want he should go on courtin' her here?" Elihu opened his lips to speak, but only emitted a groan. "We have got to bear our part. I guess the rule against marriage ain't any stronger than the rule of love and charity,

—so long as we don't any of us marry, *ourselves.*"

"Well, well!" cried Elihu, "settle it amongst you. Only remember, they can't marry here." He took his hat, and went into Humphrey's room, where the latter had remained, discreetly absorbed in his accounts; and Laban, finding himself alone with the sisters, hastened to follow Elihu. Their withdrawal was inspiration to Frances—

"I guess I can go down to Boston with Egery, and fix it with my sister so 't she can stay and be married from her house whenever she gets ready." When the sensation following her solution of the problem allowed her to speak, she added, "The question is how much it 'll be right for us to do for her. She hasn't got a thing."

The sisters justly understood this to mean their degree of complicity in decking Egeria for the unholy rite, and they entered into the question with the seriousness it merited. They began by agreeing with Elihu that the only way was to have nothing to do with the matter; and having appeased their consciences, they each made such concessions and sacrifices to the exigency as they must. Before spring, when the wedding took place,

the sisters had found it consistent with an enlarged sense of duty to present the bride with a great number of little gifts, of an exemplary usefulness, for the most part, but not wholly inexpressive of a desire, if not a sense, of beauty. Their conceptions of the world's fashions were too vague to allow of their contributing to the trousseau, and such small attempts as they made in that direction were overruled by Frances's sister, a decisive and notable lady, who, however, ordained that certain of the decorative objects, as hooked rugs and embroidered tidies, were as worthy a place in Mrs. Ford's simple house as most of the old-fashioned things that people like nowadays. With Frances, the question whether she should or should not be present at the wedding remained a cross which she bore all winter, and which grew sorer as the day approached. When it actually came, she meekly bowed her spirit and remained away. But she found compensation in the visit which she paid her sister directly afterwards, and which she spent chiefly in helping Egeria set in order the cottage Ford had taken in one of the suburbs. He had worked hard at his writing all winter, and they had no misgivings in beginning life on his earnings, and

on the small sum Egeria had inherited from her grandfather.

It is now several years since their marriage, and they have never regretted their courage. They had their day of carefulness and of small things—that happy day, which all who have known it remember so fondly—but this is already past. One of those ignoble discoveries which chemists sometimes make in their more ambitious experiments has turned itself to profit, almost without his agency, and chiefly at the suggestion of his wife, whose more practical sense perceived its general acceptability; and the sale of an ingenious combination known to all housekeepers now makes life easy to the Fords. He has given up his newspaper work, and has built himself a laboratory at the end of his garden, where the income from his invention enables him to pursue the higher chemistry, without as yet any distinct advantage to the world, but to his own content. It is observed by those who formerly knew him that marriage had greatly softened him, and Phillips professes that, robbed of his former roughness, he is no longer so fascinating. Their acquaintance can scarcely be said to have been renewed since their parting in Vardley. Ford was able to see

Phillips's innocence in what occurred; but they could never have been easy in each other's presence after that scene, though they have met on civil terms. Phillips accounts in his own way for not seeing his former friend any more. "As bric-à-brac," he explains, when ladies inquire after their extinct acquaintance, "Ford was perpetually attractive; but as part of the world's ordinary furniture he can't interest me. When he married the Pythoness, I was afraid there was too much bric-à-brac; but really, so far as I can hear, they have neutralised each other into the vulgarest commonplace. Do you use the Ford Fire Kindler? He doesn't put his name to it, and that isn't exactly the discovery that is making his fortune. He has come to that, —making money. And imagine a Pythoness with a prayer-book, who goes to the Episcopal church, and hopes to get her husband to go too! No, I don't find my Bohemia in their suburb." From time to time Phillips proposes to seek that realm in what he calls his native Europe; but he does not go. Perhaps because Mrs. Perham is there, widowed by Mr. Perham's third stroke of paralysis, and emancipated to the career of travel and culture, which she has illustrated

in the capitals of several Latin countries. To do her justice, she never turned the waterproof affair to malicious account, nor failed to speak well of Ford, for whom she always claimed to feel an unrequited respect.

As to Hatch, one of the first of those deep and full confidences between Ford and Egeria which follow engagement related to the man in whom Ford had feared a rival. Egeria knew merely that Hatch had repaid with constant services some favours that her father had been able to do him in their old home, and that he had continued faithful to Boynton when all others had dropped away from him.

"I wish I had understood now it was when he came to me there in Boston," said Ford. He added simply, "I treated him very badly, because I thought he was in love with you."

"Was that any reason why you should treat him badly?" asked Egeria.

Ford reflected. "Yes, I suppose it was. I was in love with you too. But he's had his turn. He's left me with the feeling that perhaps"—

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps—nothing!"

Egeria divined what he did not say. "He

hasn't left *me* with that feeling," she said reproachfully.

Since that time Hatch is no longer on the road, as he would phrase it, but has gone into business for himself at Denver, where he married last year, with duly interviewed pomp and circumstance, the daughter of one of the early settlers, a hoary patriarch of forty-three, who went to Denver as remotely as 1870. He called upon the Fords when he came East on his wedding journey, and he and Ford found themselves friends. The Western lady thought Egeria a little stiff, but *real* kind-hearted, and one of the most stylish-appearing persons she ever saw. In fact, Egeria shows a decided fondness for dress, and after the long hunger of her solitary girlhood she enters, with a zest which Ford cannot always share, into all the innocent pleasures of life. She likes parties and dinners and theatres; since their return from Europe she has given several pic-nic breakfasts, where her morning costume has been the marvel of her guests. The tradition of her life before marriage is locally very dim; it is supposed that she left the stage to marry. This is not altogether reconcilable with the appearance of quaint people in broad-brims, or in gauze caps

and tight-sleeved straight drab gowns, with whom she is sometimes seen in her suburb; but as the Fords are known to go every summer to pass a month in an old house belonging to the Vardley Shakers, their visitors are easily accounted for.

The grass has already grown long over Boynton's grave. They who keep his memory think compassionately of his illusions, if they were wholly illusions, but they shrink with one impulse from the dusky twilight through which he hoped to surprise immortality, and Ford feels it a sacred charge to keep Egeria's life in the full sunshine of our common day. If Boynton has found the undiscovered country, he has sent no message back to them, and they do not question his silence. They wait, and we must all wait.

THE END.

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